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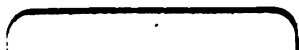
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SARA · WARE · BASSETT

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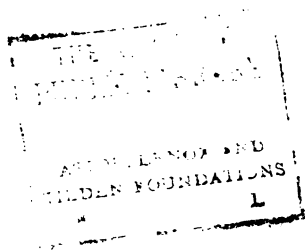
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Sweet



GRANITE AND CLAY





“Well, suppose you could do as you pleased, what then?” he went on with a touch of cynicism.

FRONTISPIECE. See page 74.

Granite and Clay

By SARA WARE BASSETT

AUTHOR OF

"Flood Tide," "The Harbor Road," "The Wall Between," "Taming of Zenas Henry," etc.

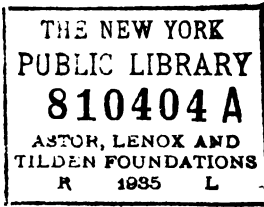


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GRANITE AND CLAY

GRANITE AND CLAY

CHAPTER I

THE TROTH

It was December.

The plumes of the pines, etched black against a flaming orange sunset, sparkled with the gems of a newly fallen snow. Luminous white made light the forest, throwing into cameo-like relief each obscure beauty and blemish of the woodland and transforming into sharply defined silhouettes the skeleton tracery of tree, branch, and every tiny growing thing.

Through the tangle of stunted fir and oak a path threaded its way, a path that rose and dipped with the sandy country until it seemed almost a part of the undulating ocean that leaped to meet it. This path linked the hamlet of Belleport with the seacoast, and moving along its sinuous windings, purpled into shadow by the waning day, came Penelope Turner, a buoyant figure stepping airily and leaving in the virgin snow small, clear-cut footprints. In and out the maze of undergrowth she moved, the hush of the snow, the peace of the twilight, the music of the surf about her.

And yet for all the brooding solitude of the place, Penelope was not alone. Rapidly blotting out her tracks beneath a stride, speedy and determined, a man in khaki hastened after her.

"Penelope!" he called. "Penelope!"

He need not have spoken twice, for the name echoed resonantly on the quiet air, putting to flight the fancies that intrigued the girl and causing her to wheel about and stand waiting.

"Dick!"

"I spied you across the fields the moment I left the train and followed you," panted the soldier as he reached her side. "Are you surprised to see me?"

"How could I be anything but surprised?"

He laughed boyishly.

"I got the chance to run back home for a week's furlough," explained he, the words tripping eagerly from his tongue. "We go across this month."

"To France? Dick!"

"Great luck, isn't it? Hundreds of men would give everything they possess to be in my shoes." His face glowed with excitement. "So before sailing I came back to see the folks — and you," he added, his voice dropping to a caress.

A pause fell between them.

"You knew I'd come before I went, didn't you, Penelope?"

There was no answer but as she averted her head he saw a wave of color surge into her cheek.

"I had to come," he rushed on. "I just had to see you. I've thought of nothing but you ever since the day we said good-by on the station platform. There was something in your eyes then that made me suddenly wonder if you — if you cared, Penelope — if you could possibly care. I didn't dare think so and yet the wild hope would persist. It has haunted, tormented me, every instant, and I couldn't go away without knowing."

He waited for some sign that she heard but the drooping head was not lifted; nevertheless that she listened was betrayed by the quickened rise and fall of her breast and

the intensity with which her white teeth caught and held her lower lip.

"You think me mad, Penelope — presumptuous — and perhaps I am. I realize we know one another very little. But all that makes no difference. Only two things count: one is that I am going away, and the other is that I love you — love you!"

The phrase echoed vehemently in the stillness.

"Probably it has all been a mistake — my thinking you might feel as I do; and of course it is all right if you don't. I know I haven't much to offer a woman. Nevertheless —" the words weakened and died away into uncertainty.

Still she did not speak. They had slackened their pace and now stood in the path, she toying with the tip of a cedar spray and he nervously kicking the snow with his heavy boot.

"You are not angry, Penelope!" he burst out at last, when he could endure the silence no longer.

"Angry!"

With a swift gesture the girl raised her head, a glory of surrender shining in her eyes.

"Penelope!"

Exultantly he caught her in his arms, bending low to let his lips rest against her hair and the warm hollow of her neck. So they stood motionless, wrapped about in the silence, heart throbbing against heart.

Then presently Penelope drew shyly away.

"So you do love me, sweetheart?" whispered the man, scanning with triumph her burning face.

"Yes, Dick."

She looked gravely up at him; then interpreting his start toward her stepped aside.

"It is very wonderful, isn't it?" ventured she, with an unsteady little laugh.

"It is a miracle!"

He seized her hand and taking from it her heavy woolen glove crushed her fingers in his broad palm.

"I know that with the thought of you ahead I can make my way," he declared. "The war can't last long. We shall have the Germans on the run by the end of a few months and I shall be home again. You'll see then how I'll work. I'll slave day and night for you, Penelope."

The earnestness and youthful egoism of his wooing was very appealing and the girl's eyes rested on him with tenderness and pride.

"I wish I didn't have to leave you," he went on, once more holding her close against him. "I thought if I just told you I loved you it would be easier to go away. But it isn't, it's harder now, a thousand times harder."

"I wouldn't have you *not* go for anything in the world," interrupted Penelope. "Why, half that makes me so glad and proud is that you volunteered to go without being forced to do so. I wish I were a man!"

"I'm almighty glad you're not," he laughed, his cheek brushing hers. "It's because you're just what you are that it is all so — so —" the halting sentence was lost in the pressure of his lips against hers.

The sun had gone now and shadows dimmed the wood until only the massed outlines of the pines bordering the footpath were visible. Hand in hand they walked along slowly, dreamily. Above them a pale star trembled, and the wind that barely stirred the trees bore on its fragrant breath a constantly deepening murmur of the sea.

"I wonder what your people will say," mused Dick aloud.

He felt her fingers close on his with an involuntary tremor.

"You don't think they will object, do you?" he asked anxiously.

"N-o; at least, I don't believe my aunts will," was the hesitating answer.

"But Mr. Allen — your grandfather?"

"— I'm not so certain about Grandfather," replied she very slowly. "He has pretty positive ideas, you know, and —"

"He may feel I haven't any prospects," broke in the man, completing the unfinished argument. "Or maybe you think he'll say I have no right to tie you up and go to France."

"I can't predict what Grandfather will say," Penelope responded. "I only know that he's awfully fond of me —"

"Remarkable!"

"And that he wants me to be happy."

"Also unoriginal."

The smile acknowledging these jests was, however, a faint one.

"Grandfather may decide that I'm — that you're — that we're too young," suggested the girl.

"But good Heaven, Penelope! You won't let his opinion come between us!"

"N-o."

"Promise me."

"I promise."

"Promise me with a kiss."

She raised her arms, drawing his head down until his face touched hers.

"I'm — I'm a little afraid of your grandfather, sweetheart," confessed her lover dubiously.

"So am I, Dick," the girl owned. "I guess almost everybody is. But for all that he is very splendid, and he loves me."

"As I do — only not half so much!" cried the soldier with rapidly rising passion. "I'll have you, too, Penelope — aunts or no aunts, and in spite of all the Captain Jabez Allens that ever lived."

Yet notwithstanding the sanguine assertion, a cloud of apprehension flitted over the youthful countenance making it apparent that affirm as strongly as he might Dick Morton deemed the antagonist he must confront no mean opposer.

And well might he feel trepidation. Captain Jabez Allen was a person before whom many another in Belleport older and more authoritative than Dick had quailed and shown the white feather.

CHAPTER II

THE OLD CAP'N

CAPTAIN JABEZ ALLEN, known to all Belleport as well as the outlying community as "the Old Cap'n," was in reality far from being old. His seventy years rested like thistledown on his shoulders which were as square and erect as in the days when he had paced the deck of the *Flying Cloud* and ordered her crew in ringing tones to haul up the sheet anchor. Men under his command had unfailingly recognized the timbre of authority in his voice and had leaped to obey him; and ever since, both on sea and shore, the Old Cap'n's word had been law to whomsoever came within echo of its sharp cadences.

His daughters Martha and Elizabeth, middle-aged spinsters who since the death of his wife had kept house for him, never questioned his mandates but with a docile "Yes, Father," meekly assented to whatever he decreed. Neither of them would any more have thought of making a suggestion at variance with his wishes than she would of leaping into the surf that boomed up against the sands almost beneath the window. There was one will in the Allen household and that was the Old Cap'n's. At least there had been only one until the coming of Penelope.

Penelope Turner, hazel-haired revolutionist of six years, had arrived on a sunny June day many years ago. In a travel-stained wagon drawn by a lean gray horse

she had driven from the tip end of the Cape and been delivered over to her grandfather by a dusky Portuguese woman. Her advent had not been unheralded, however, for ever since the tidings of John Turner's death had been received the Allens had been awaiting her arrival. Had the truth been known Martha and Elizabeth had watched with no small measure of trepidation the crest of the hill where the road wound between low walls of pines and dipped among roses and sweet fern into the hollow of sand that bordered the bay. As for the Old Cap'n, if he felt any deep concern regarding his unknown grandchild, he at least contrived to conceal the fact from his daughters. It was he who had ordained that the little one should come and he was not a person to go back on a decision when once he had made it.

Of course Penelope might have gone to John Turner's sister who owned a tiny farm at Bridgewater. She knew well that the Old Cap'n had never sanctioned his daughter Mary's marriage with her brother. Nevertheless, although she had offered to give the girl a home, she was none too eager to add another child to the brood that was even now fast outgrowing the diminutive house. She had been fond of John, however, and was too conscientious to permit his offspring to become a suppliant for charity. But the offer had been as promptly declined as made. Penelope's grandfather preferred to take her and he requested that there should be no further argument about it. There was none. Ellen Clayton was only too thankful to be relieved of a responsibility she could ill afford to assume. If the Allens were willing to look out for the waif so much the better. Indeed, Ellen had half expected that such would be the outcome, for whatever else the Old Cap'n might be (and to his disobedient daughter he had certainly proved an unrelenting parent) he had the reputation of being honorable

to the letter and living up to a cast-iron code of ethics.

Possibly pride, which was a fundamental of his character, had prompted these sharply defined standards of right and wrong; or perhaps, on the other hand, his credo was the heritage from a rigid Puritan ancestry. Whatever the source of his inexorable Cromwellian precepts the Old Cap'n was endowed with basic religious scruples from which his conscience permitted no deviation. He seldom talked about them, it is true, but like a shimmer of gold they shone through his every act, inspiring a confidence toward him that few persons in the town could boast. As a result he had been made senior deacon of the small white Congregational church that fronted the village green; and he it was who kept the key to the building, rang the bell on Sunday, and carried home in a covered basket the silver communion service. He also had charge of the scanty funds of the society and passed the plate at divine worship, money being as safe in his hands, the village affirmed, as in the hands of the Lord himself.

The same, alas, could not have been said of every resident of Belleport, for there were those in the community who had slipped from grace and followed after strange gods — or no gods at all. But amid the muck of things the Old Cap'n's morals remained adamant; and if the piercing blue eyes and thin lips bespoke a New England niggardliness, as was generally acceded, with equal justice public opinion agreed that every human being had his limitations. For example, the Old Cap'n saw no reason why he should not hold a flaw toward himself and auction off a cracked pitcher to Martin Eldridge if Martin had not the enterprise to come forward from under the shady tree where he was indolently seated and inspect his purchase. In fact, Captain Jabez had even chuckled at his dupe's complaints and declared it served

him right, as no doubt it did. Deacon though he was, Jabez Allen had many such a transaction to his credit and far from blushing for it he rather prided himself on his reputation for shrewdness. Nor was he a merciful creditor. He would have his full pound of flesh every time.

On the other hand, nothing would induce him to take a cent more than was his due. Once, when the widow Bearse had sent him her rent and he had discovered eleven cents too much in the envelope, he had plodded two miles in the blazing sun to return the excess pennies. Yet, scrupulous as was this honesty, it did not prevent him from driving the sharpest bargain possible on every occasion. A business deal, contended he, was a matching of wits; and if his wit was keener than the other fellow's, as it usually proved to be, why — Captain Jabez shrugged his shoulders and smiled a dry smile.

It was chiefly because John Turner had been born with such a scant measure of this commercialism that the Old Cap'n had objected to his wedding Mary. John Turner was every man's prey. He was a dreamer,—a penniless, improvident soul who trusted that the good God who had made him would befriend him should he deliver over his last farthing to another who needed it more; or spend it for a book of verses or a bit of artistic pottery. Beauty was more to him than food or raiment and as a result he had come to man's estate with scarce a copper in his pocket. A lovable, easy-going fellow was John, with a shock of tawny hair sweeping his forehead, and gentle eyes beautiful as a deer's in their softness. The Old Cap'n scornfully adjudged that he had no force, which perhaps was true. Nevertheless there had been in him some quality strong and persistent enough to lure from her home Mary Allen, who never before had lifted up her voice against her father or defied his will.

How she had fled with her lover had caused a pretty scandal in tranquil Belleport. It had furnished the town with gossip for weeks. People had looked askance at Captain Jabez, yet not one individual had had the temerity to mention the catastrophe to him when he came striding down the village street with his chin in the air, his shoulders squared, and his steely blue eyes looking straight before him; and strangely enough, during all the years that had rolled by since, nobody had ever summoned nerve enough to refer to the tragedy.

A rumor that Mary Allen and John Turner had subsequently been married at Provincetown had filtered into Belleport, and later had come tidings of a child's birth, but that was all. There were those who whispered that Mary had bitterly regretted the ill-advised step which she had taken; that she lived in constant want, and that the slender income maintaining the family was due to her efforts; then there was an opposing faction who asserted with equal confidence that, although poor, Mary Allen was radiantly happy in the choice she had made. Which-ever the true version of the drama, certain it was that she starred in it but a brief time, for before the end of a short span of years both she and the hero of her romance were drowned when a little skiff in which they were sailing had overturned amid the breakers that fretted the shores of Provincetown harbor. As a result the six-year-old Penelope had been cast upon the mercies of the world and her grandfather, Jabez Allen.

All that had happened long ago and the girl, now almost twenty, was probably the only creature in the world who knew the gentler side of the Old Captain's stern nature and regarded him without awe. Her power lay in the ingenuous manner in which she had begun. No precedent had hampered her; she recognized no traditions of strict obedience to this lord of the community.

The afternoon of her arrival she had disturbed the rhythmic beats of her grandfather's daily program by interrupting his two o'clock nap, and ever since that time she had continued to interfere with him without scruple.

Not that she did this wittingly. No, indeed! With the supreme ignorance and audacity of youth she merely rushed in where angels had feared to tread, and so astonished and charmed was Captain Jabez by her daring that without argument he had capitulated. No one else had ever presumed to rumple up his hair or laugh at him, much less rifle his pockets. The august old gentleman was at a loss as to how to conduct himself in the presence of treatment such as this. And although he would not have owned it, no power on earth could make of the first time he had been jauntily kissed on the top of his head anything but a bewildering experience.

In the meantime Martha and Elizabeth regarded these feats with breathless wonder. Never had they dreamed, even in their infant days, of approaching their father so lightly. But Penelope, no respecter of persons, climbed unabashed upon his knee, playfully tilted back on his forehead the spectacles that graced his nose, and merrily set at naught his every command. Once when she had stolen up behind his chair and mischievously covered his eyes with her wee hands, Martha in consternation had called sharply to her to come away and not interrupt her grandfather's reading. Much to her astonishment, however, the woman had received scant thanks in return for her altruism, for instead of applauding her act her father had rebuked her by the words, "Let the child alone, Martha! She's doin' no harm."

Although it was not actually true that ever since that day Martha had nursed her injured dignity, nevertheless it was a fact that throughout the long years that followed she had to a certain extent heeded her father's injunction

and beyond the trifling elementary discipline necessary had washed her hands of Penelope. In fact, neither she nor Elizabeth understood in the least the species of humanity which the Lord had seen fit to place in their midst.

"The child is all Turner!" announced one of her aunts to the other. "There isn't a drop of Allen blood in her veins. I don't see what's goin' to become of her when she grows up."

Well, she had grown up and despite the lugubrious prognostication, nothing very amazing had become of her save that from an angular child whose questioning eyes of jade green peered at one with disconcerting intensity from beneath a mop of thickly curling brown hair, she had developed into a creature of indefinable charm. She was not exactly pretty. Rather she was magnetic. There was grace in the proud poise of her head, in every movement of her slender form. When sudden emotion possessed her there was fascination in the swift dilation of her eyes, in the quiver of her nostrils, and in the cadence of her voice, imperious and caressing by turns. The fact that her smile came rarely rendered it more potent, and because she liked best to be alone her infrequently bestowed presence became a benefaction. Elusive as a coveted woodland flower, idealistic as a youthful poet, she was indisputably her father's daughter and day by day the much despised Turner qualities she possessed continued to strengthen until she became John Turner over again. Surely the Old Captain must have recognized in her the characteristics he had so zealously derided and felt at times that Fate had played him an ironic trick to invest the idol of his existence with the very traits he detested and disapproved. Or was he so blinded by affection that he failed to see that life had beaten him at his own game?

Every one in Belleport witnessed the paradox and cov-

ertly smiled. But if Jabez Allen resented the dealings of Providence he proudly locked within his breast any murmurs at the judgment the Almighty had meted out and tranquilly went his way. He let himself be tyrannized over without protest and even regarded with tolerance the books of poems, the bits of color, the masses of flowers that strayed into his home. Belleport whispered that the Old Cap'n was changed, that he had softened and become more human; and on the strength of this information several wary souls who previously had feared to do business with him ventured timidly into such commercial enterprises. Alas, they speedily awakened to their mistake for however transformed Jabez Allen might be in the bosom of his own family with regard to the outer world he was quite as shrewd a dealer as of yore. The horse that Janoah Eldridge bought of him proved to be blind in one eye; and the clock he traded for Willie Spence's oars went only four days instead of seven. "A bargain's a bargain!" was all the satisfaction either of the unlucky purchasers obtained.

Yet, for all that, Captain Jabez was a different man and no one was better aware of it than himself. A new gentleness had crept into his austere nature; a new unselfishness into his heart. For the first time in his life he loved with an idolatry of which he trembled to think. Even his worship for his God, he owned with shame, was less fervid and intense than was his adoration for his grandchild Penelope. To give her happiness he would have bartered his immortal soul; and with the growth of his passion he began to understand Mary better and measure her conduct with a broader charity. It was, then, this magic force of loving that had bewitched her! If he with his adamant will could not keep his footing against it how much less could a weak creature such as Mary? Poor Mary! Perhaps he had been hard

on her. Of course he had been right. There could be no question about that. Still, he wished there yet remained a chance to temper justice with mercy and to bestow upon her the forgiveness he had so pitilessly denied.

Well, her child remained to him, and be she what she might, the tolerance he had refused her mother he would show to her. If the Lord's punishment had taken the form of sending an incarnation of John Turner into his home he would accept the chastisement with meekness, rejoicing that it was not yet too late to prove his regrets for the past. Truly the ways of the Almighty were mysterious and beyond all fathoming.

"Thy knowledge is too high; I cannot attain unto it," murmured the defeated Jabez Allen.

CHAPTER III

PENELOPE

PENELOPE TURNER lived in pictures. Against varying artistic backgrounds she had from a child seen herself as the chief character in a romantic drama. Now she reigned the crowned queen among a band of dancing fairies; now was rescued from sinking ships; now entered old feudal halls on the arms of richly clad knights; or with mirror in hand she slipped, a lithe mermaid, beneath the scintillating emerald currents of the sea. Or perhaps she was a shepherdess on some green slope of a lonely mountain; or a singer who astonished a spellbound world by her marvelous voice. Wherever she moved it was always among dreams and unrealities. The cavernous shiftings of a cloud bore her to mystic lands and on the curling foam of a wave she traveled in imagination around the universe. Strange music came to her with the zephyrs from the pines and with the lashing of the surf against the shore; and in the brook's ripples and the flutter of the lilacs about the door, little songs reached her ear. A world was hers that was unseen by others, a world of epic and poetic beauty in which she was the dominating figure.

As a child of eight she built sand castles on the beach — castles glittering with gems and resplendent with jeweled ramparts; she peopled them with lords and ladies and here she ruled in fantasy. Out of this era of romance she emerged into girlhood and, although she no

longer fashioned for herself transient kingdoms at the sea's margin, in her mind she still reared structures as perishable, erecting them, dream upon dream, until they towered high as the dome of blue that arched the waste of waters lapping the thin arm of the Cape. Heroes now dwelt within her courts—nay, one supreme hero, a knight or prince who, usurping the central place in her little dramas, had brought with him new and disquieting fancies and sensations that delighted even while they terrified. One never saw his face. Wrapped in a mantle of mystery he sped elusively before her. But he was always strong, brave, holy,—the instigator of noble deeds, the unconquerable who put all things beneath his feet. She bent to his will and in her subjugation she rejoiced.

Thus she had lived, playing the dual rôle of actor and spectator.

Then came a day when suddenly she had beheld the hero of her imagination in the flesh, and romance had been transformed from a filmy fabric of the mind to breathing reality. Penelope was just twenty when the miracle took place. War had quickened into life the heroism that smoldered in all American manhood, and on every hand youth, with gaze fixed on a distant star, had leaped to exchange the weapons of peace for those of conflict. Belleport, tiny and remote as it was, caught the echoes of the world strife and the one young man eligible for duty rushed forward to offer himself for God and country. This was Richard Morton, Dick as he was familiarly called in the hamlet. He was a fisherman, an offshoot of the old Puritan stock, who had been born amid an environment of surging tides, shelving dunes, vistas of low pines, and the wheeling flight of broad-winged sea gulls.

Until this great moment of tragedy no one in Belleport

had thought much about him. He had gone his uneventful way, doing his prosaic task with stolid fidelity and expecting neither recognition nor praise for his lowly services. If secretly he had ventured to lift his eyes in admiration toward Penelope Turner and covet her womanhood no one had detected his ambition — least of all Penelope herself. And then had come the clarion summons to war and Dick Morton, faithful to a few things, had, figuratively speaking, suddenly become ruler over many. So keen was his conscience, so genuine his patriotism, it never occurred to him to attach any great measure of merit to responding promptly and fearlessly to the call that resounded throughout the land; and it was not until he discovered himself to be invested with a glamor of veneration quite new that he realized the community regarded him as a hero. Men who had forgotten he was in their midst now remembered him with hastily conceived affection and flocked about him, pouring out benedictions on his head. How they exulted in his Cape ancestry and boasted that he was a child of the village! How they dragged forth the pranks of his childhood, reviewing his past with tenderness and molding into virtue his every vice!

Although bewildered, Dick nevertheless modestly accepted the adulation offered him. He dutifully shook hands with persons he scarcely knew and permitted himself to be kissed on the cheek by numberless ladies who pressed into his hands comfort bags, mufflers, mittens and socks. Among the throng who on the day of his departure assembled to bid him God-speed was Penelope Turner and he had been amazed to detect in her eyes a light that set his heart beating madly and the blood throbbing in his veins.

And then he had gone away only to return months later an erect, soldierly figure in khaki. He had been

granted a furlough before sailing for France and he had come home to Belleport to say good-bye to the parents who dwelt in the weather-beaten cottage on the bay. If the memory of a girl's eyes had haunted him, mingling with this filial devotion and drawing him back to the little fishing hamlet with magnetic power, who could censure him? Youth, love and conquest go hand in hand, with hope, like a will-o'-the-wisp, dancing ever before and beckoning them on. Motives are complex factors and often so deeply embedded in the subconsciousness that they defy analysis. In any case Dick came, and to Penelope he was the knight of her dreams setting forth for battle. To him she attributed myriad characteristics he, alas, had never possessed and which had their existence only in her imagination. He was the Lohengrin, the Galahad, the spotless King Arthur. What he really was when stripped of all this tinsel Penelope could not have told, for although the two had lived for years in the same village the community was a widely scattered one and their previous acquaintance had been only of the most superficial type. Had she seen him dragging his dory along the sand or spreading his nets to dry on the beach she would probably have passed him with a curt nod. But now everything was changed. His heart might still in reality be stranger to her heart, his soul to her soul; it was enough that armed to do battle for his country he faced with dignity and courage the perils and uncertainties the veiled future held. In consequence he was all she had pictured a hero to be and she loved him. She must love him, she argued. Of course she did. He was her first wooer and a very ardent one, and the music of his pleading came like an echo of that melody she had so often heard in her dreams.

Once more, as if acting in a drama, she saw herself back amid the romantic imagery of her girlhood, the

adored of a blameless knight. And yet in spite of the consciousness she was not shamming.

Dreams are true while they last,
And do we not live in dreams?

To Penelope the experience was one of the most genuine of her life. If there was unreality it lay in the humdrum world about her, not in the realm of her imagination. Nevertheless, in spite of her sincerity, she could not entirely lose her identity in the rôle she was playing or wholly detach herself from the spectators' attitude of mind. Even when, amid the throng of townsfolk that crowded the station platform she bade Dick farewell, her innate sense of the dramatic made her well aware of her actions and his, and a self entirely apart from the pretty pantomime watched the parting with an artist's satisfaction.

During the days following his departure, when kindly neighbors offered their condolences at the absence of her lover, she still continued to live the part she had in fancy rehearsed. She greeted their queries blushing and thanked them for their sympathy with such perfect proportions of shyness, pride, bravery and resignation that when the postmaster handed out a letter with a foreign stamp upon it and exclaimed, "I guess you'll be mighty glad to get this!" he thrilled with approval at the droop of her eyelids and the timid smile she flashed upon him. His enthusiasm was still in the ascendent when another customer entered and it led him to assert with conviction:

"Penelope Turner got a letter from France this noon. That Dick Morton who's goin' to marry her is a lucky man — the rascal!"

Had he but known it these very letters which subsequently came at irregular intervals and which he felt so

certain must bring pleasure were to Penelope the first sinister harbingers of an awakening. During their whirlwind courtship she and Dick had exchanged few real opinions upon the graver things of life. Rather their conversation, if conversation it might be termed, had been made up of sensations, whispers, pauses, glances, caresses — the thousand and one delicious devices lovers substitute for words. But now, with an ocean between them, all these pretty inventions were set at naught and it became necessary to put down in black and white what was in their minds and hearts, and great was the amazement of each to know what the thought of the other actually was. Making every allowance for the difficulties expression engendered, for haste, fatigue, and possible uncongenial surroundings, Penelope was grievously disappointed in the epistles her lover penned.

They were immature, boyish letters filled with a jumble of new impressions. They told of great cities hitherto unseen, of vast ships, of feats of engineering, of the comradeship of man with man. Their lines teemed with the joy of adventure; and there were scraps of humor and ludicrous little pencil sketches of warriors weighed down like camels with every sort of burden. One would have had difficulty to discover either poetry or romance anywhere in their pages. Instead of being love letters they were nothing but a chronicle of the sane and healthy-minded reactions of a normal youth who had seen little of the world to a strange and novel universe. Hungrily Penelope read them, searching every sentence for the lover of her imagination but no trace of him could be found. Why, save for a word or two of affectionate farewell, these merry, friendly notes might have been addressed to any one,—to a man's mother, aunt, grandmother!

In the meantime she wrote to him answers which, al-

though she did not suspect it, were quite as unsatisfying, — rhapsodies on the sea, the clouds, the beatings of her heart, her loneliness, her love. In a far-away trench, thirsting for tidings of home and surrounded by grim and very real happenings, Dick Morton perused them and they contained an irritatingly flat sentimentality markedly at variance with the world in which he was moving. He liked sky, flowers and trees well enough but he could not read, much less write, reams about them. He would a thousand times rather have known whether the herring had begun to run in Eel River yet; how the bluefishing was; and what his friends at home were doing. Such a letter as this, filled with town gossip, would have been a blessing in No Man's Land, a thing to read and reread. But all this *dröol!*

Not that he was not genuinely fond of Penelope; on the contrary he was to a great extent still beneath the spell of her enchantment. He could see now the light in her haunting, gray-green eyes and feel the flutter of her delicate hands in his. A wooer was thrice blessed who won such a jewel. Nevertheless he could not continuously keep step with the music to which she moved. If they were ever to be happy together they must get down to a plane more solid than clouds and sunsets. The world was a big place, far bigger than he had dreamed, and life a grim, gigantic business,— not a dainty pastoral. He loved the fight of it. But how far away it made Belleport seem, and how small! And Penelope — after all, what did he really know of Penelope? Well, concluded he with prosaic loyalty, there was nothing to be done but for them to get acquainted with the other's true personality. Everything would be sure to come out all right when he got home — if he ever did.

Meanwhile, in the distant, sea-circled hamlet he had

left behind, Penelope was playing her part with equal sanguineness. Tirelessly she went to church, made dressings, rolled bandages, knit socks and sweaters. A mixture of pathos and courage, she was the ideal bethrothed of an absent soldier. The most critical judge could not have detected a flaw in her conduct. In fact, both her aunts were gratified beyond measure by her new womanliness and dignity, for spinsters though they were, they had their standards for love and romance and took, perhaps, even keener pleasure in both because they themselves had been cheated of them. In fact, during Dick's brief courtship it had been amusing to see how these two gray-haired women circled about the lovers, softly closing doors at opportune moments and conducting a sign language behind their backs of which they were the innocent subjects. Two thin, gaunt creatures who had been starved for the fulfillment of womanhood until they had become quite sexless, they nevertheless had not entirely forgotten their youth and its visions. Fifty years of constant drudgery had worn Martha's tall and bony frame to angularity; thinned her hair; and given to her mouth a droop of patient resignation. She could not remember the time when she had not scrubbed and scoured pans, washed floors, and cooked for her father. It was the life the Lord had meted out to her and docilely she accepted it, looking forward to no other.

Of everything connected with a house she had made herself mistress. She not only knew how to bake and brew, how to can fruits and vegetables but on the tip of her tongue trembled the mystic formulæ for removing every imaginable kind of blemish from every imaginable sort of fabric. The housewifely arts were in her blood. With noble brow, clear eyes, and the wiry frame that is the heritage of hard work, Martha Allen was the personification of stern New Englandism. Yet with all her

flintiness she was very human. Dearly she loved a bit of gossip; and if, stanch Puritan that she was, she could recite each Sunday sermon forward and backward she could also, with equal glibness of tongue, report just what every woman in the congregation had on and whether her apparel was old or new. There was, however, no malice in this comment; she was simply a realist who, if she had possessed a writer's art, would without rancor honestly have set forth the virtues, follies, beauties and limitations of humanity as she saw them. The village feared her a little but her most bitter enemy never failed to concede that Martha Allen had a level head.

Perhaps it may have been because of her own sound judgment and clear-sightedness that Elizabeth's vacillating and uncertain character was so hard for her to bear. For Elizabeth never did the thing one had a right to expect her to do. Belleport summed up her lack of logic and consistency in the one word "highty-tighty." You could depend on Martha but you never could depend on Elizabeth. Into her nature seemed to have seeped the changeableness of the shifting sands that on every side surrounded her. She had a troubled, hypersensitive personality which was kept in constant turmoil by an overdeveloped conscience. No matter what she did she always wondered afterward whether it would not have been better if she had done something else. Where Martha thought, acted and stood stubbornly by her conduct, Elizabeth rushed forward, wavered, acted, regretted and bemoaned. Her days were days of introspection and bitter self-reproach.

"I s'pose I might have," was the phrase that fell from her lips a score of times 'twixt sunrise and sunset.

"It beats me, Eliza, why you can't do a thing an' then let it alone," her sister would exclaim impatiently. "What use is there in diggin' up everythin'

an' pullin' it to pieces when once it's done an' over with?"

"But I want to be sure I did the right thing," the unlucky creature would whimper.

"Didn't you feel you were doin' right when you did it?"

"I — yes — I thought so at the time."

"Then leave it be, for pity's sake. Don't go harpin' on it. Quit thinkin' about it an' go at the next thing."

Caustic as was this simple remedy for Elizabeth's ills it failed to sear into her marrow and as a result her face wore an anxious, puzzled expression which onlookers interpreted as fretfulness. In contrast to Martha's smooth brow her own was furrowed with wrinkles, and although she was five years the junior of her sister she appeared ten years older. At forty-five she had arrived at no solution of the world or the creatures who peopled it. She moved amid a vast enigma that had neither beginning nor end and possessed no answer. What marvel that such an existence left her nettled and wondering?

Nevertheless, in spite of the opposition of their dispositions, there was a deep-rooted affection between the two women. They shared a common pride in their Pilgrim ancestry; in the blameless reputation of their forbears; in the self-respecting position they held in the community. Their father was a notable figure in the town; they were as well-to-do as their neighbors,—perhaps even a trifle better off; and save for Mary's willfulness, for which they were in no wise responsible, no breath of calumny had ever touched the Allen name. What more could one ask of Fortune?

Yet beneath their serenity there lurked in the mind of each a very grave menace to their peace. This was Penelope. What of her? Ah, well might they ask themselves that question! Penelope was anything but a calculable factor.

CHAPTER IV

TIDINGS FROM OVER SEAS

IF Penelope were a problem to her aunts how much more baffling was she to the Old Captain who had never understood her father and entirely lacked the key to natures such as hers? But for the affection that held the two together, and the logic Jabez Allen brought to bear on the situation, the girl's existence in the old homestead that fronted the sea might have been a vastly unpleasant one. Amid a haze through which he saw but darkly, the Calvinistic doctrine of retribution offered the one illuminating gleam. He had been harsh and unforgiving to the mother, visiting upon her a sentence of banishment whose severity was out of all proportion to her offense. Had she married a criminal he could not have pronounced a more drastic decree against her. After all, what had there been against John Turner save that he was a dreamer and that Captain Jabez did not like dreamers? There was, to be sure, the mortification of being beaten and the Old Captain was a proud man in whom even now the defeat of having another preferred to himself still rankled like a sullen, inextinguishable flame. Nevertheless, the years had brought with them both wisdom and charity and he knew now that had he the thing to do over again he would stifle his pride and forgive Mary and her husband.

Why was it that life must be spent in learning to live? Fortunately, he had enough of the sporting instinct in

him to be a good loser if the game were a fair one and he could not but admit that the retribution Providence had visited on him was merited. Not all the punishment for our deeds, philosophized he, is delayed until the Hereafter; much of it we live out in this world; and in accepting Penelope, who was as like her father as the offshoot of the parent tree, he was living out a measure of this punishment. He would not whine but would bear it unflinchingly and like a man.

Therefore whenever he failed to understand this enigmatic granddaughter of his he summoned his affection to the rescue, blindly trusting where he could not see. He did not attempt to guide; rather he followed gropingly the flights and dips, the elusive flutterings, the bursts of song, the complaints of despair, knowing full well that his course of action in any given situation and Penelope's would be as widely apart as the stars.

Hence when Dick Morton came upon the scene and the rapid courtship and betrothal took place, Captain Jabez astounded his daughters by offering no protest. He would interfere with no more wooings and matings, resolved he, with stony determination; he had made trouble enough for himself as it was. Nevertheless, although he so docilely gave his consent, his keen old eyes looked out from beneath their massively overhanging brows and missed no turn of the drama going on before him. Had Martha and Elizabeth been able to read deeper into his heart they might, perhaps, have decided his acquiescence less sterling than it appeared on the surface.

Dick Morton was going to war, argued Captain Jabez. Who could predict what Fate held in store for him? He might never return. Besides, he and Penelope were very young and at best the latter was little else than an idealist like her father,—an unstable person liable to flights of fancy and reversals of mind. Indeed, he had a sus-

picion that in point of fact it was the romance rather than the lover that held her. The whole affair might come to naught. Why stir up trouble by refusing to accept something nebulous as a mirage? And even were he to forbid the bans was he certain he had the power to enforce the edict he pronounced? There was a vast deal of John Turner in his daughter and the Old Captain had not forgotten that he had been routed before by an antagonist equally misleading in gentleness and amiability. To veto the engagement might only precipitate a marriage and any such dénouement he was determined to thwart at all costs. In consequence he gave an assent to the union that nonplused the village by its cordiality, and had young Morton been actually his grandson he could not have bidden him Godspeed with greater warmth and fervor. But when the leave-takings were over and life narrowed down into its former humdrum groove, he watched Penelope with lynx-eyed intensity, scrutinizing her moods and studying her expression whenever missives from her lover arrived. Afterward, alone in his room, his face would light with quiet satisfaction. Penelope was waking up to something — that was evident. There was a dissatisfied little pucker between her brows that foreshadowed some sort of disappointment; he knew it of old. Many a problem that made life difficult was solved by waiting. Ah, Penelope's affairs were sure to work out satisfactorily — never fear!

And perhaps had it not been for the interference of unlooked-for circumstances the gradual disillusion Captain Jabez prophesied might really have taken place. But one October day young Morton's father came driving up to the door and beckoned to Elizabeth who was washing down the back steps.

"Penelope home?" he inquired abruptly.

"Yes."

"I — I've got somethin' to tell her."

The tensy of the words caused Elizabeth to glance into his face. It was a rugged countenance, bronzed to toughness by exposure to sun, salt and wind. Deep furrows in the tan showed streaks of white, and the eyes had the watery softness typical of the seafarer. Hair and brows were a grizzled brown but the mouth, usually smiling, wore no expression of geniality to-day, but instead was ominous with tragedy.

"What's the matter?" murmured Elizabeth in a frightened whisper. "Dick ain't — it ain't bad news, is it?"

The reply was so slow in coming that the woman trembled; then moving automatically forward, she closed the kitchen door and leaned weakly against it.

"My land!" ejaculated she in a terrified voice.

"They ain't wholly certain he's dead," put in the man with instant optimism. "He was sent to do outpost duty an' just didn't come back with the others. That's all. But afterwards there was a big explosion an' though they didn't find no trace of him, one of his mates said he saw Dick lyin' amidst the rubbish. I'm afraid there ain't much real chance of his bein' alive. If he was they'd 'a' heard somethin' from him before now."

With every word the light of hope that had flared up in the man's dim blue eyes faded, giving way to misery and despair.

"Oh, Mr. Morton, I'm so sorry!" cried Elizabeth. "Poor Dick! We all were so fond of him. Isn't it terrible!"

She began to whimper and wiped away her fast gathering tears with the corner of her apron.

"He was a good son to me — I couldn't have asked for a better," answered the father, his own control steadied by the woman's emotion. "You'll tell Penelope,

won't you? It will be hard on her, poor girl! Don't give her any hope. 'Twould be cruel. The boy is gone an' she must face it like the rest of us."

Stunned by the tidings and not knowing what else to do Elizabeth stood watching while Dick's father gathered up his reins and rode slowly away between the lines of lime-washed stones that marked the sandy driveway; then, eager to impart her news and shift the burden of its responsibility to other shoulders, she hurried into the house.

"Martha!" she called. "Martha!"

"Martha's stepped over to Bearses' for a cup of molasses," answered the Old Captain, glancing up from the *Belleport Clarion*. "What are you in such a stew about, Eliza?"

"Nathan Morton was here just now."

"Well?" queried Captain Jabez sharply.

"Oh, Pa, it's awful. He says Dick's been killed."

"Killed!"

"Yes. Leastways, that is what his father told me. He said he was sent somewheres to do somethin', an' somethin' happened to him," concluded Elizabeth incoherently as with wan face she collapsed into a chair. Sincerely as she regretted the tragedy she so seldom found herself in the limelight that she quite enjoyed her momentary importance. In fact, it was characteristic of her that she relished the morbid far more than the optimistic and had come to delight in it to such an extent that now, had she been honest enough to admit it, she would have been compelled to own that she preferred bad news to good. Therefore, after making her melodramatic announcement and stealthily watching her father for some sign, it dampened her spirits to no small extent to receive from him no comment on her tidings.

"Ain't it awful!" she at last exploded, when she could endure the silence no longer.

Still the Old Captain did not reply.

Elizabeth fidgeted impatiently with her apron.

"Did you ask if there was anything we could do for the Mortons?" Captain Jabez at length inquired in a matter-of-fact tone.

"No. There! Warn't that just like me? I s'pose I might have. I wish to goodness I had. The thought never entered my head. Likely Mis' Morton will think it queer 'nough. She'll probably — yet mebbe she's rather — you know you never can be sure how folks will take things. I might go up there, mightn't I?" She rose to her feet, then suddenly sat down again. "Still, p'raps it would be as well if I telephoned. I don't know just what *to* do." Nervously she twisted and untwisted the string of her apron. "Hadn't I better wait until Martha gets back an' see what she says?"

At another time the Captain would have smiled at so typical a substitute for action, for Elizabeth was habitually wont to flee to this avenue of escape every time a decision confronted her.

"I'll 'tend to it," cut in her father.

"I guess you better, Pa," came comfortably from his daughter. "As long's I didn't do it in the first place, it might look — still I was so struck of a heap —"

"Where's Penelope?" Again the Old Captain interrupted her.

"Penelope? Well, there! She oughter be told, oughtn't she? Oh, dear me! There'll be a to-do now! She's up in her room, I guess, or in the attic. I saw her take a brush an' start upstairs. I wondered then what —"

"I'll hunt her up."

"Don't you want me to?" faltered Elizabeth.

"No."

"But she may faint or do somethin' awful. Hadn't we better put off tellin' her 'till Martha gets back? Seems 'sif —"

But Captain Jabez was gone.

After his departure Elizabeth continued to dally with her apron string.

"I wish I had spoke to Mr. Morton," mused she aloud. "It must 'a' looked dretful unfeeling of me not to offer to do somethin'. But when you're so upset an' all, folks oughtn't to lay it up against you if you forget your manners. I do hope Pa'll be gentle with Penelope. Men are so blunt. Queer how different they are from women. She may have fainted already. It certainly is awful still everywheres. But there — she never did faint in her life. 'Tain't likely that — but fur's that goes nothin' like this ever happened to make her faint. I wish I'd gone upstairs with Pa. Mebbe I oughter have. I might go now only if Martha was to come in an' there was nobody 'round to tell her — No, I guess I'd better wait right here."

Therefore with every muscle tense and face drawn into a network of anxious puckers Elizabeth waited.

No sound came from the floor above.

"I do hope Pa'd have the sense to call me if anything happened," she whispered to herself. "I wonder if I could hear him if he did. The door might be shut so I couldn't."

Rising, she stole into the hall.

"Mebbe he wouldn't like me to go taggin' him upstairs if I was to go now. 'Twould look as if I was listenin'. I wish to mercy Martha'd come back. Likely she's settin' talkin' at the Bearses' just as if there was no such things as wars an' killin's. I wonder if I'd oughter go an' fetch her. I've half a mind to. P'raps

she'll say I'd oughter gone an' got her. But fur's that goes she'll say I oughter done whatever I haven't anyway. She always does. I never seem to see things as she does — never! Of course 'twouldn't take me long to step over there. Still, s'pose Pa was to call me while I was gone? No, I guess —" The monologue of uncertainty was broken off by Martha's appearance in the doorway.

"Well, if I ain't thankful you're back again!" the wretched Elizabeth ejaculated. "Whatever have you been doin' at Bearses' all this time?"

"I had to go for molasses," was the curt retort. "How did you happen not to get the jug filled last week?"

"There! I knew there was somethin' else I meant to order of that man when he was here Saturday! It was molasses. Did you ever! An' you had to go way over there —"

"And leave the gingerbread half stirred up — yes, I did," was Martha's grim interpolation.

Elizabeth could see that her sister's face was stern with displeasure and she now realized for the first time that a half-finished baking littered the pantry shelf. Timidly she started to speak; then lost courage and hesitated while Martha took off her sunbonnet, washed her hands, and went into the closet.

"Somethin' terrible's happened while you've been gone," she at length blurted out desperately.

Martha wheeled about from the board where she had begun to sift flour.

"What?"

"Dick Morton's killed."

"How do you know?"

"His father was here an' told me."

"Why didn't you say so when I came in?" demanded

Martha, whisking back into the kitchen and standing accusingly before the offender.

"I was so upset 'bout the molasses that I —"

"Where's Penelope?"

"Upstairs. Pa's gone to tell her."

Without a word Martha crossed the room, and wiping the flour that powdered her hands on her apron as she went, she sped into the hall and up the stairway. Left in solitude Elizabeth could hear her sister's swift step echoing through the stillness.

"There! I *had* oughter gone up!" wailed she. "Still, if I had, there'd been nobody down here to tell her when she come in. I s'pose she'll blame me. But she'll blame me anyhow. I never do seem to hit it right. Don't it beat all!"

CHAPTER V

A VOICE FROM THE BEYOND

SLOWLY Captain Jabez mounted the dim stairway whose spiral windings creaked beneath his feet.

Well, Penelope's romance had terminated precisely as he had expected — he did not own as he had hoped, for the old Captain was not a heartless man. It was tragic that a youth as promising as Dick Morton should have been cut off from life while he stood at its very threshold,— tragic and terrible that the youth of any country should. War was a cruel, unintelligent means of settling disputes and one which the world should by this time have outgrown. But if civilization were still too childish to adopt methods more worthy, what alternative had an outraged nation but to fight? Disaster and death were but the natural aftermath of such conflict and must be expected.

Nevertheless, although all these reflections passed swiftly through Captain Jabez's imagination and he mused with genuine regret on the fate of young Morton, it was not really he on whom his thought was centered as he climbed the shadowy stairs. Penelope was uppermost in his mind. How would she take this calamity? He had never been able to fathom the depth of her sudden affection for this man. Her reaction to love (if indeed love it were) had been of a type he did not in the least understand. Not that she had not done all the things that a maiden swept away by the tides of her first

romance might have been expected to do. Oh, Penelope had smiled and blushed and wept just as he had fancied girls doing; she had been ecstatic and depressed by turns, had been stimulated to alternate gayety and thoughtfulness. But beneath these moods he had felt something to be wanting; what he could not have told.

There was no such incompleteness in the affection she displayed toward her aunts or himself. Spontaneity vibrated in voice, glance, deed, and if there were less poetry about it nevertheless it held a quality that satisfied. But in this more vital relation, the great mating of her life, he sensed a vague deficiency which he could only define by saying that the girl seemed to be forcing herself to artificial expression. Still, this judgment might be quite groundless. What did he know of the psychology of love? Certainly Penelope had been all that was sweet, modest, charming. Could one ask more?

So he trudged on up the stairs and through the narrow halls, Oriental with timeworn pagodas, curious little bridges, and Chinese junks sailing on mythical seas. Penelope was not in her room nor did the wooden flooring above his head give forth evidence of any presence. Going to the door leading to the attic, he lifted the latch and softly called her name.

"Yes, Grandfather," came the quiet answer.

Up he went over the quaint, spatter-work stairs.

Penelope, with eyes large and startled, was sitting on a trunk, her hands tightly clasped in her lap. A breeze sweeping in from the sea stirred the little curls of soft brown hair that framed her face but save for this almost imperceptible movement she was as still as if turned to stone. As Captain Jabez looked at her the pathos of her attitude not only told him what he dared not ask but filled his heart with self-reproach.

"I heard," explained she with her eyes on his.

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The old man did not speak. How empty words were at such a moment? There seemed to be nothing to say.

"I — I'm sorry, Penelope," he ventured at last, thinking as he uttered the phrase how vapid it sounded.

At his voice he saw her chin quiver and he went to her side, drawing her into the shelter of his great arm. He was not a demonstrative man and so seldom did the depths of his affection give evidence of their being that in spite of his awkwardness the act took on a peculiar force and significance.

"You knew, of course, that something like this was liable to happen," murmured he after an interval, in which he touched the girl's hair with his hand.

"Yes."

"Dick has given his life in a great cause."

"Yes."

"You will always have it to remember."

"Yes."

A pause fell between them and as she rested passively against his shoulder, her eyes sought the floor.

At a loss for further words the Old Captain became silent, his gaze traveling across the dusty chests beneath the eaves — old wooden sea-chests with handles of rope and bearing the scars of many a rough voyage. A cracked mirror in a frame of pale gilt leaned against one of them, and a confusion of disabled furniture, noseless water pitchers and discarded magazines littered the floor. Heartened by a rift of light shining through the dusty window at the end of the room, a spider in a rectangle of sunshine was creeping up the side of a dingy pewter teapot that stood near the big square chimney marking the center of the garret. Idly the Captain watched it slip backward on the smooth surface of the metal. The chill of the October day breathed in the atmosphere and he shivered a little.

Then of a sudden quick steps resounded in the hall beneath and Martha's grave face appeared above the stairway.

"You better come downstairs, Penelope," said she, addressing the girl in a practical tone. "This is no place to stay. It's cold an' dirty. I'll finish the brushin' up by an' by. Pa, you go down an' light a fire in the sittin'-room so'st to get a comfortable spot for the child to sit."

Welcoming action of any sort the man rose and obeyed. Martha went over to her niece and taking her hand went on kindly:

"I'm so sorry, dear. War is a terrible thing. But remember many another woman besides you will have a like sorrow to bear. Think of poor Mrs. Morton — her only son! And Mr. Morton, too. I'm goin' up there now. You wouldn't like to come with me, would you?"

Amazed at the question, the girl shook her head. "No," she answered with offended dignity.

"Well, perhaps it is just as well," Martha continued. "You can go some other time."

For an instant she stood silently looking down on the apathetic figure on the trunk, her head towering into the cobwebbed angles of the slanting roof.

"I think we'd better go down now," announced she.

"I'm as well here as anywhere."

"Nonsense! There's chairs an' a fire downstairs."

With reluctance Penelope arose and followed her mentor down to the tiny living room where behind closed doors she continued to sit motionless all day long. She did not read, she did not sew, she did not even weep. The next day and the next she remained there, morose and idle. Neighbors came and went and through the door that led to the kitchen she could catch the subdued murmur of their voices and the whispered interrogation, "How is she?"

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Some of those more intimately acquainted with the family inquired particularly for her, and now and then one of her aunts would tiptoe in to ask if she would not like to see some old friend. But the reply was always the same:

"I do not want to see anybody."

"Her grief is somethin' awful," the girl heard her Aunt Elizabeth remark to Mrs. Marvin, the minister's wife. "I'm afraid she'll never be the same again. Ever since the news came she's been *a blighted bein'*."

The phrase pleased Mrs. Marvin's fancy. She was a romantic creature who delighted in the sentimental. Incidentally she was in addition a great gossip and therefore it followed that before night she had rolled the three words beneath her tongue dozens of times and all the village knew that for love of Dick Morton his sweetheart, Penelope Turner, had become *a blighted bein'*. This seemed to the hamlet a fitting fate for a bereaved fiancée. It seemed so to Penelope herself, although to do her justice her grief was very real. Nevertheless, whether she mourned for Dick himself; for the great sorrow-stricken world in general; or for the death of her own particular hopes, she could not perhaps have told.

One thing, however, was certain — she would now have no use for the dainty garments she had begun to fashion or for the household linen she had started to embroider. There was never to be a wee cottage where her own hearth fires would blaze and friends come at her beckoning. That dream was over. Instead, she must go on forever staying with her grandfather and her aunts; putting up with Aunt Martha's sharp corrections and Aunt Elizabeth's tiresome repetitions. To the end of her days she would always be an outsider living in a home which was hers only through sufferance, charity. If she wanted company she must beg the privilege like a

dependent. Over and over there would be the same endless washing of the sprigged china; the same dusting of the same old crevices in the furniture; her grandfather's same old stories and jokes. She would simply settle down and grow old and scrawny and middle-aged as her aunts had done.

It hardly seemed worth while to take up life again; in fact, it did not seem worth while.

Day after day, engrossed in such thoughts, Penelope sat indoors until days ran into weeks and weeks into months. Winter passed and spring came, and still she made no attempt to banish her depression.

"She's just sorter stunned," she heard Aunt Martha explaining to a solicitous visitor one evening. "You can't rouse her out of her grief, poor child!"

Stunned, blighted! Yes, mused Penelope, that was exactly what she was, and a little tremor of satisfaction crept over her. How dramatic it was — her romance and its climax! Was it not wholly consistent that a girl whose lover had been killed in battle should be stunned and blighted? She rather liked to feel the town was thinking of her as a grief-stricken, blighted creature. And when in the course of time her invalidism became sufficiently established for friends to send in flowers, clam broth, or jelly, she toyed listlessly with these donations quite as if she were playing a part on a stage. By summer, encouraged by the attentions of the villagers, her aunts' sympathy, her grandfather's anxiety, frugal diet and a lack of fresh air, she began actually to look ill and quite exulted in her transformation. Interesting shadows darkened her eyes, making them unwontedly large and appealing; her skin, too, no longer exposed to salt winds and sunshine, had whitened into pallor. Even the blindest spectator would have noticed a decided change in her appearance. And the more her countenance al-

tered the more languid became her attitude. So completely was she now lost in the character she was portraying that her sense of the dramatic swept her along until she was entirely unconscious of being a mummer.

In the meantime Captain Jabez worried himself into such a state of nervous irritability that he did not sleep; and from morning to night he helplessly nagged at his daughters and reproached them because they did not do something about Penelope.

"You women oughter have the brains to doctor her up," fumed he. "There must be medicines an' things you could give her. Yet here you sit like bumps on a log, lettin' the child die before your very eyes. She's goin' down into the grave—that's what she is. Pinin' away. I'll bet she's lost thirty pounds."

"I don't see what we can do, Pa," returned Martha gently. "Doctor Carver has seen her an' he says medicines won't help none."

"She's eatin' her life away with grief—dyin' of a broken heart," put in Elizabeth who, much as she loved her niece, could not completely stifle her pride in the broadcast solicitude the Allens were awakening.

"She must have cared for Dick Morton a sight mor'n we thought," commented Martha, voicing aloud for the first time her former skepticism.

"Damn Dick Morton!" snapped Captain Jabez. "I wish to heaven Penelope had never laid eyes on him."

"True love is beyond comprehension, Pa," simpered Elizabeth self-consciously. "It is *foreordained*."

She had used the word before when talking with the neighbors and found it effective.

In fact, Penelope's unhappy romance had elevated the household into public gaze until, as at the time of Mary's escapade, their affairs were once again the foremost topic

of conversation in the community. For a time, to be sure, interest had focused on the bereaved Morton family; but when they were discovered to be comporting themselves in normal fashion and meeting their sorrow with commonplace resignation, concern for them shifted to a morbid exultation in the grief of Penelope Turner. Here at last was something to gossip about. As if viewing a cineograph they beheld a woman pining away and dying because her lover had been shot in battle. How romantic! How altogether suitable! The sentimental wallowed in the tragedy.

Not that any one really wished ill to Penelope. On the contrary everybody in town liked the Allens and was fond of Mary's daughter. Nevertheless there was no denying that Belleport was pleased to find itself in the spotlight and the cynosure of all the countryside. When the hamlet had sent Dick to war it had to some extent experienced this consciousness of its own importance. Other villages along the Cape, however, had sent soldiers to France—some, in truth, sending many more than Belleport—so the prestige of the town was soon blotted out. But no hamlet anywhere about could boast an epic,—thrilling, pathetic and satisfying at every point as was this one. It was a story worthy of an opera or to be immortalized between the covers of a book. In hushed tones Belleport related it, waxing eloquent with emotion and, although no one whispered it to his neighbor, almost everybody in the town began secretly to plan fitting rites and memorials that should forever commemorate the poetic event.

Thus a year passed and with November came the signing of the Armistice and the exodus of the American forces from Europe. And then one day, all unheralded and unlooked-for, into the little Cape Cod settlement that mourned him as dead came Dick Morton!

He was bronzed and gaunt, and a sadness in his eyes proclaimed that he had eaten of the tree of knowledge and known both heaven and hell. The boy who had gone forth was gone forever and in his place there had returned a man,—strong, alert, and with a wisdom bred of suffering and contact with the world and his fellows. Two wound stripes glistened on his sleeve and a captain's insignia adorned his cap and uniform; and deep in his breast pocket, had it been known, nestled a Croix de Guerre and two citation ribbons.

A very different matter was his arrival from the noisy farewell with which he had gone forth. Now not a word was uttered when he made his appearance. Only an awed silence greeted him as he came down the station platform toward the little group who were regarding him with fascinated, half-terrified eyes.

"Didn't you fellows know the war was over?" he called dryly to Daniel Snow who, with open mouth, was struggling to compose himself enough to gather together the odd collection of grips and luggage the brakeman had pitched into his arms.

"Yes! But — Good Lord!"

"Then what's the matter with all you people?" laughed Dick. "Turned into graven images?"

Still there was silence.

"We all had you dead an' buried!" Johnnie Drew at last gained courage to pipe.

"Me!"

"Sure."

"But I wrote home as soon as I could."

"'Twarn't soon enough to prevent the whole town from thinkin' you were with the angels," Johnnie explained. "No letters got to Belleport. If they had, the whole place would 'a' known it."

"Jove! And my people think —"

"I'm afraid they do," nodded Johnnie. "An' Penelope Turner, too."

To the latter observation young Morton paid no attention. Perhaps he did not hear it. By this time he was moving from one of the little knot of friends to another, shaking each man by the hand and exclaiming:

"How are you, Eph? How are you, Billy? Yes, I'm back. The scrimmage is over, thank the Lord! Tell you about France? I'm afraid I can't just now. It's too long a story. Some day I will, though. Bully to be home again. Best country ever! God's own. Take it from me there's no place like it. Got your horse here, Nat? What do you say to toting me and my dunnage over to the town?"

"I'd admire to, Major. Goin' long the shore road to your father's?"

"Er — no. I want to stop a moment at the Allens' first."

As the slim figure sprang into the wagon the onlookers exchanged significant glances.

Before he went to see his own family he was going to see Penelope!

CHAPTER VI

THE SPECTER APPEARS

ALONE in the living room Penelope was sitting before the Franklin stove, her eyes fixed absently upon the blaze that flickered fitfully up within it. Her hands lay clasped in her lap and over her shoulders hung a crocheted shawl of soft white wool which she occasionally drew about her with a little shiver. Although through the window's small panes stretched a sweep of ocean whose deep, undulating blue was fretted with riotous edges of feathery whiteness, the girl's head was turned away from the magnificent spectacle. She had no interest either in the splendor of the sea or in the four-masted schooner which far out against a bleak sky fought dauntlessly to make its way against the fierce head wind. Nor did she heed the boisterous-crashing of the surf that, whipped into mounting masses, foamed down upon the sands of the bar with a mighty roar.

Captain Jabez would have had out his binoculars in a twinkling had he spied the ship with sails so snowy against the cobalt of the horizon.

But what cared Penelope for ships, or waves, or tides; or the awe-inspiring beauty of the morning? She had reached a point where one day was to her like another. The only pity was that day must succeed day, month follow month, and year lengthen into year, when in reality her life was ended already. The reach of time that lay ahead contained no prospect but loneliness and inevitable spinsterhood. Well, what did it all matter? Life could

not last forever and perhaps she might as well drag out her existence in Belleport as anywhere else.

But why had such a lot fallen to her? Other girls married, had homes of their own, bore children, and were blessed with careers of normal domesticity and happiness. Why had it been ordained that her future be spoiled? It was all very cruel, very unjust, and she pitied herself with all her heart.

A door opened softly.

"Are you warm enough, Penelope?" inquired a solicitous voice.

"Yes, Aunt Elizabeth."

The great jade eyes glanced up dully.

"Don't you think that if I brought you a glass of milk you could drink it now, dear? You didn't eat much breakfast."

"I hate milk."

"But you could drink it if it was good for you."

The phrase was an unfortunate one; for Penelope, bent at the moment on hastening her end, had no interest in patronizing measures that should prolong life.

"I don't want any milk, Aunt Elizabeth," returned she peevishly. "I wish you'd let me alone."

"There, there, dear," interposed her aunt in the soothing tone one might have used toward a child. "Of course you needn't drink milk if you don't want to. I just thought you might like it. You must be faint."

"I'm not," pouted Penelope.

"Isn't there somethin' I can do for you before I go?" persisted the woman, as she stooped to smooth the girl's hair with her fingers.

"Go?"

"Yes, I've got to be gettin' back into the kitchen to help Martha. It's washin' day, you know, an' there's bread to bake besides. We've a lot to do."

If any hint of reproach lurked in the words it found its way there unconsciously, for long ago both Martha and Elizabeth had given up expecting Penelope to bear any further part in the labors of the home.

"She's too frail to be forced to do anything," her aunts agreed. "We must just let her follow her inclinations an' do pleasant things."

And so Penelope had followed them until like a young sultana she not only offered no aid in lifting the burden of household cares but she added to them by lapsing into being waited upon. This change, to do her justice had, however, come about gradually. At first she had continued to perform the trivial duties that had to do with her own well-being; she had made her bed, swept her room, filled her pitcher and carried it upstairs. But when Aunt Elizabeth had sympathetically offered to take over these tasks her niece had with indifference permitted her to do so; and ever since, notwithstanding that her aunt had plenty to do already, Penelope had allowed her to shoulder these additional services.

So long as she was comfortable and unmolested it did not matter to Penelope how the result was achieved.

Once Aunt Elizabeth's artless allusion to the work would have roused her tenderness and spurred her to instant coöperation, for the girl was not only fond of her relatives but far too proud to accept from them a home for which she gave a niggardly return. But now no such praiseworthy impulse stirred her. She was too much absorbed in herself and her own emotions to care what went on beyond the four walls of the room she occupied.

"I wonder wouldn't you like the curtain up a little more," fussed Elizabeth kindly. "It is a splendid day outside and the room seems gloomy."

Moving suggestively toward the window she put her hand on the shade.

"I wish you wouldn't, Aunt Elizabeth," called Penelope with evident irritability. "It makes such a glare."

"It seemed to me the light would be pleasanter, that's all," was the quick reply. "You shan't have it if it bothers you." Hastily she turned about.

Penelope dropped her head back against the cushion of the chair and wearily closed her eyes and after lingering a moment, and realizing she had been dismissed, Elizabeth tiptoed out, closing the door softly behind her.

"She's dretful nervous this mornin'," remarked she to Martha when once more in the kitchen. "Strung up an' fretful as a child. I don't see how she's goin' on this way much longer. The next thing we know she'll be losin' her mind."

Martha sighed.

"It's certainly terrible depressin'," she observed. "I feel all the time as if there was a black cloud hangin' over the house. It's tellin' on Pa. He's got so he's most as blue as Penelope is. Do all I may, I can't seem to hist his spirits up. All he does is to curse the day Dick Morton ever crossed this threshold. I never knew Pa to be so bitter toward anybody before—much less the dead. Mad as he was with Mary, he softened a lot about her after she'd passed away. But this thing has took hold of him somethin' awful. He worships Penelope."

"Don't you s'pose she'll ever —"

"Come out of it, you mean? I don't know," reflected Martha hopelessly. "Fur's I can see, though I wouldn't confess it to Pa, she's gettin' worse instead of better. Certainly she's a sight more uppish an' fretful than she was six months ago."

"The poor child doesn't eat enough to keep her alive," excused Elizabeth. "Moreover, I reckon she doesn't

sleep much. Flesh an' blood can't stand goin's on like that forever. Your own nerves would be on edge were you to lead such a life."

"I imagine they would," Martha agreed. "Don't think I'm blamin' her, Eliza, an' go bristlin' up. It's only that sometimes I wonder if we've done the best thing with her."

"Ain't we done all we could — everything the doctor's told us?"

Martha nodded from across the tub of sparkling suds.

"Yes. But after all, how much does Doctor Carver know?"

"*Martha!*"

A horrified exclamation broke from Elizabeth.

"Oh, of course he's a good doctor enough."

"Good enough! I think he's wonderful," asserted Elizabeth, only half mollified. "You shouldn't run down the doctor or the minister, Martha."

"I ain't runnin' 'em down," smiled Martha good-humoredly. "But the longer I live the less opinion I have of men's wisdom. They ain't infallible any mor'n other humans. I used to think they were. But since I've lived with Pa I've decided they're only big babies that have to be petted, coaxed, coddled an' fed up like children. You can whisk their moods round with a crook of your finger. An' if you can do that with Pa, who is one of the best of 'em, what can some of the others be?" Martha pursed her thin lips. "I've come to be glad I never married a man. As for Doctor Carver, I'm only speculatin' whether he's taken the best course with Penelope."

"What on earth set you thinkin' along such lines all of a sudden?" demanded Elizabeth in an injured tone. "You were satisfied enough with Doctor Carver a few days ago."

"I'm satisfied with him now; don't go to worryin', Eliza. Still, folks do sometimes make mistakes an' I calculate Doctor Carver ain't above makin' his blunders along with the rest of us."

"*Martha!*"

"Oh, I know you think he's perfect."

Elizabeth flushed under the accusation and turned away.

"Just the same, I don't have to," sniffed Martha, wringing water out of a towel with a vehement twist of her strong arms. "I don't look up to any men any more."

"With the exception of Pa I don't see as you have any men to look up," returned Elizabeth with a spite that, do what she would, sometimes came to the surface.

Her sister laughed at the thrust.

"I should hope I didn't have to have a crowd of men stuck plumb under my nose to study the species," said she. "All you have to do is to view 'em at a distance. Look at the way they run this town. My soul! I could do the job better myself. Look at Jonathan Crocker's store! Did you ever see such a mess in all your born days? He can't put his hand on one thing a body wants. How he knows what he's got or what he hasn't, or whether he makes money or loses it I don't see. I doubt if he has the ghost of an idea about his finances—an' him town treasurer! Don't talk to me of men!"

"But Doctor Carver ain't shiftless like Jonathan," persisted Elizabeth tenaciously.

"You don't know what he is at home."

"N-o, I s'pose I don't," faltered Elizabeth, coloring to the faded hair that fringed her forehead and bending lower over the great mixing bowl.

For a moment there was silence.

"Sarah Harlow says we'd oughter shaken Penelope at the beginnin'—or spanked her," Martha burst out suddenly.

"What!"

"She says," went on Martha swiftly, "that if we'd started out different the child would never have got into such a state. She says we've coddled an' babied her until we've made her sick."

Elizabeth dropped into the chair that stood before the mixing board.

"What business had that crabbed old woman to sass you like that, Martha?" ejaculated she. "She's 'most a hundred, an' bitter as senna tea. How much does she know of love affairs? I hope you answered her up good an' sharp."

"I didn't."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't know but what she's right."

"You mean to say you think we'd go to work to make our own niece—our sister Mary's flesh an' blood—"
Elizabeth's indignation blocked her speech.

"I don't mean we'd go to work to do it," explained Martha gently. "I just mean that—"

But the sentence was never finished.

There was a footfall on the step outside and then came a knock. Wiping her hands on her apron, Martha opened the door.

"My soul!" she gasped. "My soul an' body!"

As she put out her hand to steady herself, a suppressed shriek came from Elizabeth.

"Dick Morton!" exclaimed she in a tense voice. "Dick Morton!" she repeated as if unable to trust her senses.

"Hush, Eliza!" cautioned Martha hurriedly. "Think of Penelope!"

Immediately Elizabeth clapped a flour-whitened hand over her mouth.

"Oh, I hope to mercy she didn't hear!" gasped she in a frightened whisper.

CHAPTER VII

THE JUDGMENT OF PARIS

"PENELOPE!" echoed Dick. "And what's the matter with Penelope?"

Martha's only answer was to place a mysterious finger on her lips.

"She isn't sick?" The tanned face of the young soldier clouded and his voice dropped to an anxious whisper.

With the eagerness of a hound straining at the leash and suddenly let loose Elizabeth burst incoherently into the conversation.

"You see, we thought you were dead," she began, when she could get her breath. "You didn't write or nothin' an' your father told us he'd had word that —"

"I wrote the minute I got a chance," the man protested. "I've been cooped up in a German prison camp. How could I send letters? As soon as I was free I wrote. Didn't Penelope hear?"

"Nobody's heard a word from you for over a year," broke in Martha.

"Great Scott! I don't wonder you are all knocked of a heap to see me. They tried to tell me some such yarn over to the station but I didn't half take it in. No letters! No letters at all? It seems impossible. Well, it is all over and done with now. I suppose hundreds of such accidents happened. If you had seen conditions on the other side you would wonder more of them did not

occur. You people at home haven't the slightest notion what a war like this means. I hadn't until I got mixed up in it. The chap who said war was hell was right. It's all that and more too." He paused meditatively. "And so Penelope thought I'd gone West, eh?"

Martha, to whom the phrase was new, shook her head.

"She thought you were dead," declared she solemnly.

"Well, we'll soon set that right," smiled Dick boyishly. "Now suppose you let me see Penelope."

Martha hesitated.

"Penelope," began she, and then stopped. "Penelope," she reiterated, "is — well, I don't just know how to tell you."

"She isn't married?" With an expression of consternation the returned hero looked keenly from one woman to the other.

"Mercy, no!" asserted Elizabeth, for a second time rushing into the breach. "I almost wish she was, though. You see, when word come you were dead — not being strong she —" and here the second narrator paused. It was difficult to put into words precisely what had befallen Penelope.

"She thought so much of you," Elizabeth went floundering on. "An' then gettin' a message like that —"

"For God's sake, tell me exactly what has happened," commanded young Morton in a tone of authority.

Silencing Elizabeth by a gesture of her hand, Martha commenced more quietly and collectedly to relate her story.

"For a while after you left," said she, "Penelope went round same's she always had, goin' to Red Cross meetin's, sewin' circles, an' knittin' parties. Of course she was kinder lonesome but that was to be expected an' nobody took no notice of it. Then one day your father —" Dick started but with obvious effort con-

trolled himself, "your father," went on Martha, "drove over here an' brought the news that you were missin' from your company an' that somebody'd seen you lyin' on the field shot. Penelope was in the attic workin' but she heard through the window an' she just seemed to crumple all up. It took every particle of nerve out of her. She mourned an' mourned."

"But afterwards?" interrupted Dick sharply.

"Afterwards? Why — but there wasn't any afterwards," announced Martha irritably, as if annoyed at his mannish stupidity. "That's all there is to it. She's just been —"

"Dyin' of a broken heart," put in Elizabeth impressively, unable to keep out of the conversation. "Pinin' away."

She stopped, eager to observe the effect the tidings had upon her listener.

"You mean —" the man seemed puzzled.

"She's a blighted bein'," Elizabeth explained, having recourse to her favorite phrase. "That's what she is!"

"But — but I don't understand," murmured Dick. "Is she sick?"

"Ye—n-o, not exactly. At least, I don't know as folks would call her really sick," Martha answered. "She's up an' round, if that's what you mean. But she don't do nothin'."

"You mean she doesn't do anything about the house?"

"No."

"But she goes out and —"

"I tell you she doesn't do *anything*," repeated Martha, exasperated at his stupidity. "She does not stir out of the settin' room nor lift a finger. She just sits alone an' —"

"An' thinks of you," added the incorrigible Elizabeth, softly completing the unfinished sentence.

"And you wait on her?"

The women nodded simultaneously.

"I never heard of such a thing," exploded young Morton. "Suppose I had been dead — how was such moping to help matters? The idea of Penelope flattening out like this! I wouldn't have believed it of her. Being dead wasn't the worst thing that might have happened to me by a darn sight; and if she'd seen what I've seen she'd realize it. Why, there are men all shot to pieces who have got to drag out their lives as cripples. That is trouble! Death was a merciful fate. Many a man would rather have died than accept what fell to his lot. Besides, think of the millions of people who lost those they cared about. Suppose all the universe were to sit down and fold its hands and mourn as Penelope has, who would do the work of the world, I should like to know? And even if I should have happened to be dead, weren't there still plenty of living to do for instead of lying down and chucking up the sponge like a beaten fighter? I should have thought a girl like Penelope would have had more sporting blood — let alone being so darn selfish." His indignation was sweeping him away. "Where I've come from things were done on a bigger scale. People weren't just putting their minds on how they felt themselves. If we'd done that, every man of us would have gone under. Why, I've seen boys so — but, pshaw, what's the use of talking? You couldn't understand."

He came to a stop and shamefacedly bent his head, studying the toe of his scarred, hob-nailed shoe as if mortified at the trick his nerves had played him.

Too stunned to reply, Martha and Elizabeth remained silent, seeking to recover from the effect of the passionate torrent of words.

"I'm disappointed in Penelope! Disappointed!" The young man at last spoke again.

"I think you're very unfair — leastways it seems so to me," faltered Elizabeth, the first to collect herself. "You don't seem to appreciate how much Penelope cared about you."

"I don't call making a ridiculous spectacle of herself caring," asserted Dick hotly. "I should think she'd have been ashamed to let the whole house know how she felt. Most likely everybody in town knew."

"Of course they did!" the woman retorted with offended dignity.

"Humph! Well, I don't believe in parading one's feelings out in the sunshine; that's all!" concluded the returned soldier, a hint of scorn in the words.

He picked up his over-seas cap.

"You're not goin'?" cried Martha in alarm.

"Yes, I think perhaps I better be stepping along," replied Dick in a calmer tone. "Naturally I want to see Dad and Mother. I only dropped in for a minute. I'm sorry if I got a bit hot under the collar." He colored and smiled — or tried to.

"But Penelope," Martha began hurriedly. "You're comin' back again to —"

At the moment the sitting-room door was thrown open and Penelope herself stood on the threshold. Her eyes were blazing and a spot of brilliant color burned on either cheek.

"There is no need for him to come back," flashed she shrilly. "I shan't see him if he does. I don't want to see any man who is disappointed in me — ashamed of me — considers me ridiculous!" As if ridding herself at the same instant both of her anger and her invalidism, she let the shawl that covered her slip from her shoulders and lie, a foam of whiteness, at her feet.

"Penelope, dear —" hazarded the terrified Elizabeth.

"You needn't worry about me, Aunt Elizabeth," as-

served the girl in a high-pitched, dramatic voice. "And you needn't pick up that shawl. I shan't ever need it again."

"Penelope!" implored her aunt, now thoroughly panic-stricken.

"You see!" Martha wheeled accusingly on the discomforted soldier.

"Don't blame him, Aunt Martha," interposed Penelope. "He is right — perfectly right. I have been selfish — selfish and ridiculous, too. I don't wonder he's ashamed of me and doesn't want to marry me."

With extended hands Dick strode toward her.

"But I didn't say that, Penelope," he cried eagerly.

The girl waved him off.

"Do you think I would marry you now?" she demanded with the fury of an insulted goddess. "Do you think for a moment I would marry any man who looked down on me — who married me out of pity, or because he felt in honor bound to do so? It's all right, Dick. I'm not angry in the least. I have simply found out where I stand in your eyes. Nothing you could say would alter my decision. I wouldn't marry you now if you were the only man on earth. I'd die first!"

She drew her spare figure to its full height and taking the band of gold from her left hand placed the ring on the table; then she turned and without a word of farewell disappeared into the room from which she had come.

Martha stood very still but Elizabeth crumpled weakly into a chair. "My land!" she groaned. "The fat's in the fire now!" Then catching sight of Dick, standing with his hand upon the knob of the outer door, she continued pleadingly, "But you're surely not goin' to take her at her word an' go like this. Penelope was dreadful put out when she spoke. She's so proud that —"

"Don't stop him, Eliza!" Martha interposed in a low,

distinct tone. "Let him go. Penelope means every word she said. She will never marry him now."

At the words the young man came toward her.

"I'm sorry," said he humbly. "Of course, I had no idea Penelope was where she could hear. And anyway, I know I ought not to have blurted out what I thought. But it all struck me as being so petty when contrasted with the fine, big things I've been living with over there. The men on the other side were so brave, and the women, too. Nobody can understand who did not see it. I can't take back one word. I still think —"

"There is no use for you to repeat what you think, Dick," Martha declared gravely. "We all know. An' do not misunderstand me, either, an' go away feelin' I'm put out with you, for I ain't."

"Martha!" ejaculated the protesting Elizabeth.

"I ain't sure," repeated the unmoved Martha, dauntlessly ignoring her sister, "but you've done more for Penelope than any of the rest of us would have had courage to do. There's times when folks from outside see a thing straighter than those who've been in the midst of it an' got used to it. Lately I've been comin' to feel we were on the wrong track. Penelope ain't needed coddlin' at all; she's needed a good sharp jab an' she's got it now. Of course, it's a pity it had to come from you. Still, it had to come from somebody she cared about or 'twouldn't 'a' meant nothin'. If you set store by Penelope an' are disappointed by what's happened, it's too bad. Still you're young an' somehow I have a notion you'll get over it." For the first time a slight, quizzical smile curled her lips. "I want you should shake hands before you go, just to show there's no hard feelin'. Who knows but you've been the best friend any of us ever had?"

With a kindliness too genuine to be questioned she ex-

tended her hand and the boy took it in a firm grip; then, as if moved by a sudden impulse, he bent and kissed her cheek.

"You're a brick, Miss Martha," he stammered, as if hardly knowing what to say. "Remember, though, I'm not through with this affair."

But Elizabeth was too deeply offended to do more than nod.

"I'm goin' to see what's become of Penelope," announced she, darting a reproachful glance toward her sister after the door had closed. "Poor child! She may be dead for all you'd care."

"Penelope won't die, Eliza," responded Martha with a quiet, confident little laugh. "You need have no fears of that. She's too mad to die. If I don't miss my guess, Penelope's goin' to set immediately about livin'."

CHAPTER VIII

MARTHA'S PROPHECY IS FULFILLED

BEFORE another sun had gone down all Belleport buzzed with tidings so unbelievable that the town fairly bubbled with excitement and curiosity. The fact that Dick Morton had not been killed after all would in itself have kept the tongues of the villagers wagging. But that event, miraculous as it was, was entirely lost in the far more thrilling news that the match 'twixt him and Penelope Turner had been broken off. Astounding as was the announcement there was no doubting its authenticity, since it had been the Allens themselves who had made the statement.

Miss Martha had merely asserted very guardedly to some of her neighbors that a termination of the engagement "seemed best." But Miss Elizabeth, always more garrulous and indiscreet than her sister, had affirmed outright that it was Penelope who had put an end to the romance. As for old Captain Jabez, nobody dared interrogate him. It was a well-known fact that he never gratified the gossips and that in place of information one was liable to receive a stinging rebuke. Therefore it was the more significant that he should voluntarily refer to the affair in the post office, and observe in offhand fashion to Eddie Cowan that the marriage was not to come off after all.

"Young folks change their minds," acclaimed he jauntily, and with this ambiguous affirmation he gath-

ered up his mail and sauntered out, leaving his audience to content itself without more specific data.

At a loss to solve the enigma the town twisted and turned the puzzle, examining it from every possible and impossible angle.

Evidently irreconcilable as it might appear, Captain Jabez cherished no resentment toward Dick Morton for he was overheard to greet the young soldier on the street with even more than ordinary cordiality and there were those in the town who went farther, asserting that the Old Deacon actually seemed glad the affair was over and that the rise his spirits had taken since the catastrophe was scarcely in good taste. However that may have been, certain it was that he trod the dunes as if moving on air and pushed off to bait his lobster traps with a snatch of song on his lips; and when he beheld Dick's father on the beach spreading his nets to dry, he gave him a hail ringing with such heartiness that it echoed lustily above the roar of the breakers.

But the greatest wonder of all was when Penelope Turner made her *début* on the village street. How people openly craned their necks to watch her or peeped out from behind closed blinds to see her pass! Why, it was well over a year since she had been outside her own door and in the meantime so fantastic were the tales which had been woven about her the populace was ready to believe almost anything. Gossip whispered that she had lost thirty pounds — nay, fifty; that her hair had turned white; that she was so emaciated and feeble that she had to be carried about on a pillow; and yet here was Penelope in the flesh, giving the lie to all these rumors. Cheated of its romance and the prospective column in the cemetery with the intertwined hearts, Belleport made as much as it could of the scanty tatters that remained of the tragedy.

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Poor Penelope could go nowhere without being the cynosure for prying eyes. Fingers pointed at her; fragments of comment reached her ears. Nevertheless she did not allow this publicity to daunt her but went her way between the rows of elms that lined the village street with chin tilted up and an air of independence as unassailable as that of the Old Captain himself. She attended church and gradually drifted back into the Eastern Star, the town gatherings, and the store until the sight of her at length became so ordinary a spectacle that curiosity as to her affairs lagged. Perhaps a contributory cause to this collapse of public interest was that already she had been pulled so completely to fragments that nothing more remained to be said about her. Be that as it may, gossip concerning her died down and although the hamlet was none the wiser as to what had really caused the rupture 'twixt her and Dick Morton, like a balked and exhausted child whose repeated interrogations receive no answers, it grudgingly abandoned further questionings.

Meanwhile Penelope began to take on a less haggard appearance and the salt tang of the winter wind slowly brought a glow of wild-rose color into her cheek, causing some of the more disgruntled of the scandalmongers to doubt she ever had been sick; insinuate that they had been duped; and regret the jellies, soups, and dainties they had in sympathy lavished upon her. The majority of the townsfolk, however, were of kindlier disposition and after having reconstructed their previous impressions they greeted the girl with reassuring welcome.

Yet notwithstanding their good will, Penelope was unable to shake off the consciousness that beneath their friendliness lurked a repressed, ungratified inquisitiveness; and that the myriad questions that trembled on their lips were only held back by force of will. It seemed

impossible to believe that eventually the day would not arrive when all that had passed between herself and Dick would not filter out through the community and humiliate her before the whole world. But to her surprise no such event occurred. Her own family shielded her to the very brink of falsehood, and her former lover, ever chivalrous toward womanhood, did the same. Seekers after information were chagrined to find how adroitly young Morton evaded their inquiries. In accepting their fellowship he seemed all frankness. He talked of France and the Great War; discussed the Armistice; and gave his ideas as to terms for peace. But there were two subjects on which he closed his mouth: one was his Croix de Guerre and the other was Penelope Turner.

"How the lad has changed since he went away!" commented Joel Hendricks to Dick's father. "You'd hardly know him for the same boy. He's a man now."

Ah, the mystic wand of a world conflict had wrought similar magic in many a youth who had gone out from his home a stripling! Distance, peril, solitude; a horizon that encompassed two hemispheres instead of one—all these had broadened and matured until more than one mother had received into her waiting arms a stranger in place of the child she had sent forth. So it had been with Richard Morton. War had brought resurrection not alone to the dead but to the living, awaking qualities that had gone into the making of a new man.

"You may well be proud of your son, Jake Morton," observed Adam Baker. "He's as promisin' a chap as there is anywhereabouts."

Dick was promising, and had Adam known it, it was this very promise which was bringing anxiety to the young man's parents.

"You'll be findin' Belleport dull, I'm thinkin'," Mr. Morton at last ventured desperately to the boy, when one

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evening at sunset the two were swabbing out the old dory together. "It's different from France, I reckon."

For days the thought had been on the father's mind until a moment had arrived when even at the price of precipitating a crisis he felt he must free his soul of it.

"Well, rather!"

Although the boy smiled the smile did not conceal the sigh that accompanied it.

His father regarded him uneasily out of the corner of his eye and after a pause continued:

"Yes, it's a quiet spot. Still, 'tain't such a bad place, as places go."

"It is heaven!" was the fervent reply. "A hundred times while I was gone I thought of its peace and stillness. It seemed impossible that the same world could contain the hell I was in and this paradise."

He motioned toward the horseshoe of mica-studded sands that circled the expanse of ocean. The last glow of evening was on the waters, tinting with rose the gulls that wheeled low over the shore, and touching with crimson the marshy inlets that wound in serpentine maze through the coarse salt grass.

"The sea comes mighty close to a man's heart," mused the elder Morton soberly. "Sometimes I think its pull is stronger than our love for God or for woman."

He spoke as he would not have dreamed of speaking to his son two years ago. The words were an unconscious recognition of the boy's manhood. Dick nodded understandingly.

"I don't believe that one bred by the sea ever gets its salt out of his veins," he mused. "I had plenty of sky and open country while I was away; but there were moments when I would have sold my soul to have been in the navy instead of on land."

"You wouldn't like to go away from the shore, then," ventured the elder man hopefully.

"One cannot always choose his environment, Father," was the gentle response. "Circumstances lead us this way and that, and we must seize the chances that come our way — especially if we wish to get on in life."

"Eh?"

"I've been wanting to talk this over with you, Dad, ever since I came home," continued Dick with slight hesitation. "You see, before I went away I did not know what a big place the world was, and so I was perfectly satisfied to remain here; but I have seen a lot since I've been gone — a lot of countries and men — and I realize how much there is outside the borders of Belleport. I realize, too, what a vast deal there is to learn, and how much there is to be done everywhere. Somehow, since I've had a part in helping to clean up the universe and make it more decent, I want to keep right on. You don't sense, staying at home here, what a bully country ours is, if only we live up to the best in it. You can't go through what we fellows have and simply not care. It all gets hold of you. You want America to be finer and you want to be finer yourself."

As if unconscious of his father's presence, his eyes wandered to the horizon, whose sharply defined line was fast melting into violet mistiness.

"While I was at one of the camps, waiting to get into the mix-up," went on Dick reminiscently, "I had a chance to do some studying — engineering, economics, and stuff like that. It opened up a new world to me, I can tell you. I decided right then that when I came home I'd chuck clamming and fishing and try for something bigger."

If the words were cruel the boy was too deeply in earnest to be cognizant of the fact.

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"You mean to go away to college?" faltered Jake Morton.

"Perhaps not college, Father. I'm too old for that now, and besides I've had no preparation and couldn't get in. I'd have to go into business of some sort."

For the first time a wave of self-consciousness swept over the speaker, leaving a blush behind it, and when he continued it was to speak carefully as if he were choosing his words.

"A good position isn't so easy to find. They don't grow on trees in a large city. But my Colonel has offered me a job in his banking house. I — I — happened to be able to do something for him while I was across and he wants to give me a lift."

"There'd be your board an' room if you was to go to the city, an' they'd cost money," objected Morton, senior.

"Oh, I should be earning enough to cover all that."

"He's goin' to start you in at a good figure, then?"

"Yes, I guess so. But I imagine he'd do as much even if the business didn't merit it."

"Why?"

"Oh, it is a long and mixed-up story," answered Dick, digging his foot awkwardly into the sand and watching the impression of his heel fill slowly with water. "You see, his daughter was over there doing canteen work with the Red Cross. She was stationed quite near my post and one day the infernal Huns bombed the place — blew it higher than a kite. A few of us Yanks happened to be on the scene, and — well — her father got the notion that if we hadn't rushed in just when we did —. It was a nasty business, I'll admit. In spite of all we could do, some of the women died. But Margaret —"

"The daughter?"

"Yes, Miss Wilmot," explained Dick with confusion.

"Luckily she escaped serious injury. In fact, I hap-

pened to come home on the same ship with her and her father."

"Oh!"

"Yes," said Dick in an offhand tone, nervously repeating the assertion, "both she and the Colonel were aboard my ship. They live in Boston."

Morton, senior, was silent. It was as if he had stumbled upon a hidden mine, the existence of which he had not suspected. Being a slow man mentally it took a little time for him to right his ideas. It was, then, neither chagrined pride nor a broken heart that was taking Dick to Boston; nor was it wholly the craving for a career. These might be the factors that figured in the foreground; but in the background, whether Dick sensed it or not, was a woman's beckoning hand. Mr. Morton's days may have been passed with only ships and sun and sand for company, but he was a clear-sighted reader of human nature nevertheless. Therefore when he advanced the guarded query,

"An' what is this — this Miss Wilmot goin' to do, now the war is over? I s'pose she's come home uneasy as you," he was taken aback to receive the reply:

"I believe she is to be married. She has been engaged for a long time to an Englishman who has charge of her father's London office."

The young soldier traced an elaborate pattern in the hard beach sand.

"And was he on the ship, too?" came from Dick's father.

"No, oh, no!" was the terse reply. "He was in London."

CHAPTER IX

A WAY OUT OF A DILEMMA

ANY one thoroughly understanding Penelope would very soon have realized that the upward tilt of her chin; her smiling lips and her sharp repartee were but devices to conceal from detection a wound so acute that it rankled day and night with burning intensity. Inherently proud and high-spirited, the girl's self-esteem had been dragged in the very dust by Dick Morton's censure, and although she was honest enough to admit the justice of the denunciation, the knowledge that it was merited did not make it any easier to bear. To the depths of her being she was mortified — humiliated.

Up to the present she had, as if by instinct, acted an imaginary part. Now, again she acted; but this time a very real emotion impelled her and her acting became both deliberate and conscious. No longer did she depict art for art's sake. Her masquerading was transformed into a defense. She must let neither Dick Morton nor her family know how his words had stung or how the cadence of their scorn still echoed in her ears.

He had come back penitent the day after he had spoken and pleaded earnestly that she reconsider her decision; but with self-restraint and courtesy she had dismissed him, firmly refusing to renew their former relation. The engagement was better broken, declared she with a pleasant smile. Such mistakes often occurred and were but episodic. How fortunate that each of them had discovered the error before it was too late to remedy it!

And she had colored charmingly when they parted; taken his hand and wished him every sort of good fortune, leaving the discomforted young soldier with a realization that since yesterday the tables had shifted and that it was now he who was put to rout. Here, confessed the bewildered hero, was a new Penelope. What had become of the sensitive dreamer, the poet of clouds and sunsets? Like a wraith of the mists, existing only in the imagination of the seer, she had vanished, and in her stead there remained a worldling whose coquetry and artifice, irritating as it was, awoke one's admiration. Her gayety was high-pitched, her laughter hard, her indifference cutting in its mockery. Why, she even dared to banter him with having imbibed the French volatility! The soul that had for a moment lain quivering and naked before his gaze on that fateful day of his return — where was it now? Apparently it had either been a creation of his fancy and never actually existed, or it had vanished altogether. Not for an instant would Penelope be serious. As if transformed by a fairy wand she had become as finished an actress as ever trod the board of playhouse.

When afterward the two met in the village, as it was unavoidable they should do, she continued to preserve her demeanor of friendly politeness and jesting irony until under the lash of her tongue Dick fumed and chaffed and onlookers speculated, stared, and marveled. Penelope, bowed with grief to absolute inertia, had been a spiritless, pitiable creature, but this Penelope, with head held high and lips that laughed, was the epitome of wit and animation.

Checking every expression of sympathy her family ventured to offer, she had locked in a chest in the garret the crisp white lawn, dainty edgings and blue ribbons that had busied her during the first happy days of her ro-

nance, and without a word had plunged vigorously into the domestic duties of the home. She brewed and baked, cleaned and polished, washed and ironed — and all to the tune of a gay little song which she hummed so merrily that it would have taken a musician of trained ear indeed to detect in the melody any vibration of the sinister.

Even the Old Captain was sufficiently misled to believe her quite happy and assert to his daughters that praise the Lord, Penelope was her old self again.

As for the girl, the strain under which she lived was almost more than flesh and blood could endure. Never for a moment could she relax the tension or drop the mask that concealed her real feelings. Should she do so her aunts, whose eyes scrutinized her every mood, would be quick to surprise her secret. Both they and her grandfather had become so apprehensive that there was not a place in the house where she could go without some one tagging after her to bear her company lest she be sad or lonely. That this motive was well intentioned Penelope knew and therefore she tried valiantly to accept the kindness with tolerance. But if they would only let her alone!

Still there was one mitigating circumstance. If the house held no solitude, at least Belleport contained corners that were remote, and to one of these, a secluded little inlet that cut a path across the meadows, Penelope escaped on a day when the solicitude of her relatives could be endured no longer with graciousness. The winter had been a mild one and already the soft breath of coming spring tempered the air. There was a hint of green in the salt marsh grass, a flicker of yellow in the stems of the willows. The little curve of beach where the creek made in was sheltered by a group of silvered fish shanties and in the lee of them, where the sun poured down, Penelope took refuge.

It was a silent place. Save for the lapping of the water among the reeds that edged the stream, and the rhythmic breaking of the waves where sea and rivulet joined, there was not a sound. Before her stretched the ocean, as blank and infinite as her own empty future. They seemed strangely akin that day, and in harmony with the sobbing of the heaving expanse she threw herself down and began to cry as if her heart would break. It was the first time she had given way and oh, the relief of it! Had she been asked why she was weeping, it is doubtful if she could have told. Certainly not for Dick Morton, whom she now realized she had never loved. Perhaps it was for her disappointed hopes, the destruction of the air castles she had builded; or was the outburst only the accumulation of a general, indefinable misery? Who could tell? Certainly not Penelope, although she sobbed and sobbed, her face buried in her hands, and her slender form shaking convulsively.

So lost was she in grief and so assured of solitude that the thought of an intruder did not enter her mind and the footfall of the trespasser upon her peace was entirely unheard. That the newcomer was city bred his carefully tailored suit of tweed acclaimed, and the ease with which he wore it, together with an olive-drab sweater, rubber-soled shoes and negligée collar and tie, made it evident that he was quite at home in the athletic garb of the out-of-doors. Erect and ruddy-cheeked he came on with free stride up the beach, his head thrown back and his powerful lungs drinking in the intoxication of the day. That he, too, thought he was alone was evinced by the fact that he was whistling beneath his breath the march from Aïda to which he buoyantly kept step.

For all the youthfulness of his figure, however, one could see, as he drew nearer, that he was not really young

but a man in the glory of his strength. Either to enjoy the breeze or because the exertion of his rapid walk had made him warm, he had removed his soft felt hat, and his fine head, with its closely cropped iron-gray hair, was visible. One could see, too, his keen dark eyes; the nose large but not ill formed; and the smooth-shaven lip and chin, deeply chiseled and resolute. He was a person of force and intelligence; one to command and to see that his commands were obeyed. Nevertheless there was kindness in the somewhat severe features and a saving twinkle in his eyes which lent a magnetic quality to his personality.

As he approached closer still it became apparent that he also had as his goal the shelter of the gray fish houses, for as he reached them he drew from his pocket a briar-wood pipe which, with anticipatory earnestness, he began to fill from a pouch of soft leather. Even the match was alight and ready in his hand when his gaze was suddenly arrested by Penelope lying huddled and weeping in the shadow of the old green dory.

"My word!" ejaculated he with a start. "I beg your pardon, young woman, but are you hurt?"

Startled Penelope raised her head, her tear-stained countenance showing wan in the blazing sunlight.

"No — I'm — not — hurt," she contrived to gasp out, turning hurriedly away. "There is nothing the matter." A nervous sob concluded the sentence.

"But there must be something the matter since you cry like this."

"It's nothing," she repeated, still panting with emotion and struggling to regain her composure.

He watched as she sat up, drew out her handkerchief and mopped her eyes. Then she wheeled a thin shoulder sulkily upon him as if ashamed at being discovered in such a humiliating plight and, dropping her head, made

it apparent that she wished he would leave her. But the man was not to be rebuffed.

"You have been crying yourself all to bits," declared he with pitiless directness.

"I know it," snapped Penelope. "I've a right to if I choose."

"Undoubtedly you have," agreed the stranger. "Nevertheless by so doing you have aroused my curiosity. What can such a storm of tears be about, if it is not too great an impertinence to inquire?"

Beneath the bantering words reëchoing with blended irony and sympathy, Penelope felt the last shred of her dignity slip away.

"I'm just miserable," she blurted out childishly.

"Oh!"

"Don't you ever feel wretched?" persisted she, with rising spirit.

"Well — er — not often to the extent of tears," answered he, flashing her a smile.

"That's because you're a man and can do as you please," asserted she. "If I could do as I like, I shouldn't cry either."

"So it's because you can't have your own way that you are crying!" he announced.

Penelope flushed.

"Well, suppose you could do as you pleased, what then?" he went on with a touch of cynicism. "What would you do — or can't you answer that question? Some women can't. They merely want whatever they haven't."

The playful derision in the words stung the girl to quick retort.

"I know perfectly well what I want," declared she. "I'd leave Belleport to-morrow and my aunts, too. I want to be by myself."

"That is rather a broad hint to me, isn't it?"

In spite of herself, Penelope smiled.

"Well, and once out of Belleport, what next?" he persisted.

"Why —" for an instant she hesitated, then rushed on, "I'd go to the city and live there and write a book."

"Mercy on us!"

She was rewarded by seeing him start at her impetuous announcement.

"And why not write here?" he presently interrogated, coming back to his former quizzical manner.

"Oh, I can't. Aunt Martha and Aunt Elizabeth run after me every minute. They never let me go off alone."

"Humph!" reflected the man. He seemed to be considering her plaint. "So you wish to write, do you?" he at length inquired.

"Yes."

"Ever done anything of the sort?"

Penelope shook her head.

"No," she owned. "But I've wanted to."

"You couldn't have wanted to very much or you would have done it," was the sharp response.

"But I never realized until just now that that was what I wanted to do," smiled Penelope, a flicker of merriment in her jade eyes.

"The career comes as a sudden inspiration, eh?"

"You're making fun of me," she asserted with an injured air.

"Not a whit. I am just trying to understand."

"I've always had stories at the back of my mind," explained Penelope, after studying his face a moment and finding it quite grave. "I've never put them down on paper, to be sure, but I've thought them out just the same."

"I see."

"I've lived plays, too," she went on more to herself than to him. "Always from the time I was a little girl I've been being somebody else. My engagement to Dick was part of the play; so was his going to the war, and all the rest. It was just something I was acting out."

Her listener made no comment.

"And now I've come to a new act and something has got to happen; and as long as I'm the heroine, it's got to happen to me, don't you see? Even though I do not know yet what the rest of the story is, I am sure there must be more to it. It would not be finished were it to stop now."

"Not even if you married — eh — Dick? Most stories end that way."

"I never shall marry Dick Morton," shot out Penelope, infuriated. "And anyway, he has gone to Boston, so in future I do not expect to see him. Besides, I don't want to marry him now."

"Then that settles that!" nodded the man with an exaggerated impressiveness that made it evident the conversation was affording him rare entertainment. "You certainly shouldn't do it. Now, if I were you," continued he, "I should get some paper and pencils, go up in the attic, bolt the door, and write out the whole romance that you have been living. Get it out of your system. You will feel much better afterward."

Although Penelope scanned his face with suspicion, no hint of humor lurked in it.

"But — but — the end?" persisted she with uncertainty.

"Oh, you can make up the last chapters to suit yourself. Write several endings and take your choice."

The girl let the sand play through her fingers without replying.

"I'm fraid you have been very unhappy," ventured

her companion in a softened tone, regarding her with more attention.

"I've been utterly miserable."

In reply to the naïve confession he seemed about to frame an impulsive response but checked himself, saying:

"Sob it all out on paper and have done with it. You will be surprised to find what a relief it will be."

"And afterwards?"

"Afterwards? Oh, you can put the manuscript away and when you are an old lady read it to your grandchildren; or you can —" he was going to add *burn it* had she not completed the sentence with the unexpected words:

"Publish it."

"Why, yes. Publish it by all means if you want to. There is always room for another book if it is a good one," retorted he with an ironic chuckle.

Penelope rose and put out her hand.

"I'm afraid I've been silly and childish to cry," apologized she with winning simplicity.

Quickly the man waved her remark aside.

"You had a perfect right to cry if you wished. You got here first," he smiled. "Had I not come uninvited into your solitude I should not have known anything about it."

His smile was delightful and she smiled in return.

"Well, I shan't cry any more," she announced. "I shall take your advice and go straight to writing."

"My advice! But, my dear child, I haven't given you any advice — least of all advised you to write. That is the last thing on earth I should advise a person to do." He spoke sharply.

"Why?"

"Oh, because there are enough dabblers in the profession already," he burst out irritably. "The world is full

of people who think they can write. Besides, I make it a principle never to give advice to anybody."

"You did to me."

"But I tell you I didn't," he protested. "Haven't you any sense of humor? Now don't go running off with the notion that you are going to take up writing and become a literary genius for you will only be disappointed. Geniuses are few. Good literature is ten per cent. inspiration and ninety per cent. hard work. It is no smooth, flowery path. Besides, the profession is overcrowded already. Mind what I say, for I know what I am talking about. You settle right down here in Belleport, like a sensible young lady, with your aunts and other relatives; marry that — what's-his-name — Dick Morton, and live happily ever afterward. That's the thing for you to do."

The tone in which he spoke was gentle and soothing, even caressing, as if he addressed a child. In the meantime he had risen from the edge of the empty dory where he had been jauntily perched and once more drawn from his pocket his unlighted pipe which he now placed between his lips.

"Good luck to you and Mr. Morton," remarked he, bowing as he moved away through a film of delicate smoke.

"I shall never, *never* marry Dick Morton!" Penelope cried, hurling the words defiantly after him.

From the widening distance a peal of laughter reached her ear.

"When you write your novel," called the man over his shoulder, "do not forget to make your heroine a lady of spirit, for I believe you could portray that type to perfection."

It was not until the departing figure was dwarfed against the distant dunes and finally lost behind the jut-

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ting peak of one of them that Penelope noticed the long blue envelope lying at her feet. It was unmistakably a business communication which had been opened and read and which must have slipped from the stranger's pocket. She reached for it and held it up in the blaze of the noon-tide sunshine.

Staring with bewildered eyes she read the address :

MR. GORDON HAMILTON,
BECK & HAMILTON, PUBLISHERS,
WASHINGTON ST.,
BOSTON, MASS.

For an instant, a smile of incredulity curved her lips; then as if the coincidence were too amazing to be real, she laughed a laugh so hearty and musical that it echoed across the silent beach and startled into flight a group of tiny sandpipers coquetting at the water's edge with the foam of the incoming tide.

Again and yet again, as if to fix the clear black superscription in her memory, she read the typewritten characters on the envelope. Then tossing her head with a gesture of challenge toward the path that the stranger had taken, she thrust the letter into her blouse and turned thoughtfully home along the margin of the inlet.

CHAPTER X

PENELOPE MAKES THE PLUNGE

"WHAT on earth can Penelope be up to in the garret, Martha?" fretted Miss Elizabeth a week later. "She's there mornin', noon an' night. I went up yesterday to see if I could make out what was keepin' her, an' there she sat on a little stool, writin' away on the top of Uncle 'Lisha's old sea chest. When I asked her couldn't she find any better place than that to write she just told me to go away, please, an' not bother her. She had a ream of paper, I guess, all scrawled over an' scratched up. Who can she be writin' to?"

"I'm sure I don't know, Eliza," replied her sister patiently. "You better let her alone. Whatever she's up to it seems to be keepin' her contented anyhow, an' I'm thankful for that."

"But who can she be writin' to," persisted Elizabeth, with a curiosity not to be turned aside. "You don't s'pose it's Dick, do you?"

"Dick Morton? Mercy, no! What would she be writin' to him for when she's had no letters from him?"

"But she must be writin' to somebody," complained Elizabeth, "or else gettin' ready to, an' tryin' to make up her mind what to say. She's got somethin' in her head, you may be sure of that. For a week she's been like one possessed. She seems to grudge every minute she spends out of that attic. Why, ain't you noticed

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how like pullin' teeth it is to get her to do anything 'round the house? Yesterday she was quite tart with me when I asked her to fill the lamps an' help with the ironin'. Seems like she's droppin' back into moonin' all by herself just as she did before. Often she'll sit out on the steps an' do nothin' but stare at the ocean. What's come over her?"

Martha shook her head wearily. At times she found Elizabeth's inquisitiveness very annoying.

"Do you think Pa notices it?"

"How should I know?" was the evasive answer.

"Ain't he mentioned it to you?"

"Oh, he just thinks Penelope's got a spell of wantin' to be by herself," Martha returned. "He says to let her alone."

"But she went an' moped by herself before."

"She ain't mopin' now."

"What makes you so sure of that?"

"Can't you see the difference?" demanded Martha, wheeling on her sister with an impatient intonation. "She's happier than she was — happier than she's been for a long time."

"But it's so odd of her not to want other folks 'round. I admire to set an' talk with people an' it's beyond my comprehension why Penelope shouldn't. If she don't watch out she'll be gettin' queer like Lucia Hill."

"Nonsense!"

"But folks are driven crazy by goin' off an' broodin'. You know that as well as I do. Besides, it looks so strange — just as if she didn't like her relations. I'm sure the neighbors must notice she ain't never round the house."

Martha made no response.

"I do hope she won't do anything more to make gossip," continued Elizabeth. "For close onto three years

now Penelope's been the talk of the town an' so have we. Nobody can make out what this fuss between her an' Dick Morton was about, an' I, for one, don't blame 'em for wantin' to know. Why shouldn't they, with all of us an' all the Mortons close-mouthed as clams about it? The very fact we've all kept so mum must make 'em want to find out mor'n ever. Still, if they was to be told, I don't believe they could make head nor tail out of it. I'm sure I can't an' I've been in the middle of the mess all the time."

She sighed as she stroked the gathers in the apron she was making.

"I believe there's folks in this town this minute who think Penelope's plumb out of her head," she presently announced.

Elizabeth's random surmise was, in point of fact, much more accurate than she or any of the Allens suspected, for Belleport, miffed at having its curiosity balked, had already begun to whisper insidious comments about Penelope and her forbears.

The girl was peculiar; she unquestionably was. Her father had been so before her. Likely the Old Deacon knew more about John Turner than he had been willing to tell or he never would have shunted Mary off after her marriage the way he did. There were probably things in the man's history that would not bear inspection, perhaps criminal things. Who could say? Mary, too, must have been eccentric or she never would have taken up with such a husband.

With such unbalanced parents what could be expected of the daughter? The Allens had done wrong in trying to foist her off on a nice boy like Dick Morton. Poor fellow! Well, he had had a fortunate escape and he probably thought so too, for it was plain he had not lingered in Belleport with any desire of renewing the con-

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nection. No, indeed! Generously as he had hushed up the affair, it had not taken him long to shake both Penelope and the sands of the Cape from off his feet and make for Boston. A splendid lad, Dick Morton. His relatives did not have to blush for *him*.

How hard it must be for the Allens, after taking the girl into the house, to have her turn out so! Especially hard on the Old Captain. Of course he wouldn't say so; he wouldn't be likely to — a man of his pride. Still, it must be a gnawing and rankling trial to him. Seem's if he'd had his share of troubles with two generations of queer, willful women. Lately he'd looked bad an' who could wonder? Such trials take hold of folks an' he wasn't young any longer. Why, he must be going on seventy-four.

Thus day by day did the snowball of calumny roll up, each idle tongue adding its damaging mite until the rumors so thoughtlessly started seeped into the ears of Penelope herself.

It was Aunt Elizabeth who was the message bearer and responsible for her final enlightenment to the criticism that seethed about her.

"I can't think why you should go wanderin' off by yourself so much, Penelope," grumbled she one evening, when the girl was taking her small glass lamp from the kitchen shelf and preparing to vanish to her room. "Seems 'sif you'd be much better off downstairs here with the rest of us. Anybody'd think you'd rather be sociable with your folks than go pokin' off alone, writin' all the time. People don't know what to make of you when you act so queer an' won't go nowheres a-neighborin'. It sets 'em talking an' goodness knows you've been talked about enough already."

Penelope colored and drew in her chin.

"I don't care what people say," replied she defiantly.

"But I do; an' so does your Aunt Martha and your grandfather. It's awful mortifyin' to have you goin' on like this."

The girl started as if a missile had struck her. It was the first time she realized that her conduct reacted on others.

"Mortifying!" she repeated.

"Yes," faltered Elizabeth, rushing on as if impelled to do so by the expression she saw in her niece's face. "You don't want folks to think you're like Lucia Hill — do you? Some of 'em do already an' I ain't sure myself but if you don't quit all this writin' an' moonin' you will be, too. 'Tain't normal."

She paused breathlessly, not a little terrified by Penelope's silence.

Well, at least she had said her say. She had not intended at the outset to blurt out the truth, and now that she had done so and done it against Martha's express commands, she felt not a little frightened. How angry her sister would be with her for her meddling; and her father, too, should he find it out!

With a desperate desire to efface the effect of her words she added hastily:

"Of course, we all know here at home there ain't really anything the matter with you — leastways, not yet; an' you can show other people your mind's clear as theirs if you'll just stop all this settin' alone in the attic an' go round with 'em same's the rest of us do."

Still Penelope did not speak.

"There, there!" continued her aunt, every instant becoming more and more panic-stricken at what she had done, "I wouldn't think no more about it if I was you. Folks will talk, you know, same's the wind will blow. Your grandfather often says that's the only way you can tell 'em from the animals," she tittered weakly.

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Once more she came to a halt to hear only the ominous ticking of the kitchen clock.

"I'm sorry if I've hurt your feelin's," declared she with genuine distress. "Still, mebbe now the milk is spilt it's as well you should know what's bein' said about you."

"Yes, I am glad to know," came quietly from Penelope.

"An' you ain't mad?"

"At you for tellin' me? Not at all."

Elizabeth drew a deep breath of relief. She had escaped from the results of her misdeed easier than she had dared hope. Nevertheless had she but known it the end was not yet. Like circles that ripple in a pool after a missile has disturbed the quiet of its waters, so the thoughts she awakened in Penelope's mind widened, until culminating into resolve the girl approached her grandfather one evening when he sat smoking alone on the doorstep.

A fog was drifting in from the bay, bringing with it the tang of sea-swept caverns and salt marshes. Already the dunes towering white in the mists were being lost to view in a veil of gray, and the impenetrable curtain enveloping them was advancing, shrouding one object after another in mysterious unreality.

As Penelope sat down close to her grandfather, in the lee of the covered porch, he looked at her with inquiring eyes.

"Why, Penelope! What brings you out here in all the dampness, child? You'll be drenched to the skin. Much better stay inside."

"But I want to talk to you, Grandfather."

He started uneasily.

"What's gone wrong, little girl?" Awkwardly he reached out his hand toward hers.

"Nothing," was the monosyllabic reply. "Or rather, to speak honestly, everything, Grandfather."

"They haven't been hurtin' your feelin's?"

"Oh, no!"

Had he had less of the granite of New England in him, he would probably have drawn her toward him; as it was he contented himself with patting her hand.

"I want to go to Boston, Grandfather," blurted out the girl, stripping her desire of any cumbersome introduction.

The old man eyed her suspiciously, the thought of Dick Morton leaping to his mind.

"What for?"

Had she asked to go to India the request could not have been more astounding.

"I want to do something — go to work."

"You mean to — to — stay there? Live?" stammered Captain Jabez, aghast.

"Yes."

"But, child, there's work enough to be done at home. Besides, you've no call to earn your living."

"I'd like to."

She saw him stiffen with disapproval.

"No women folks of mine ever earned their bread an' butter yet an' I don't mean they ever shall," replied he, bridling. "I can take care of my family." Then letting his eyes travel over her face he added, "Who's been talkin' to you, Penelope?"

"Nobody, Grandfather."

"Humph! An' they better not either," he growled.

He puffed viciously at his pipe and both were silent.

"But can't you understand, Granddad, that it would be fun for me to do something?" questioned she timidly, at last gaining courage to break the long pause.

"What on earth could you do, I'd like to know?"

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"Oh, I'd find something," was the vague reply.

"I'm sure I don't know of anything you're fitted for except to stay at home," snorted her grandfather with crushing severity. "If you were to go to the city they'd set you to washin' dishes in a hotel, or bein' a waitress in some restaurant. I wouldn't listen to that no mor'n I'd cut off my head."

"But I do things like that at home," returned Penelope with spirit.

"That's different. You ain't doin' it for money."

The girl caught her underlip between her pretty white teeth as if to hold back some retort she feared might escape her; then brushing from her forehead the moist rings of hair that curled there she said more gently:

"I don't believe I'd have to do dish-washing to earn my living, Grandfather. I am sure I could find an occupation in the city ladylike enough to please even you. Many splendid women earn their living now, you know."

"They're educated for it," was the brutal answer. "They've been to night schools an' colleges, an' the Lord only knows what. But you don't know nothin'. Besides, there'd be your room an' board—they'd cost a sight of money."

For the first time the practical aspect of the question came to Penelope and the hope in her face dulled to disappointment.

"I suppose they would," she admitted.

"It would just make another big expense an' I don't see how I could —"

"But I should be supporting myself, Grandfather dear."

"A likely probability!"

"I am sure I could. Other girls do."

"An' live in an attic in some slum, with nothin' to eat. No, siree! None of my women folks will ever go to the

city to starve while I have my health an' can prevent it. With the fishin' I do, the clammin', an' the little I've got put away, I look to provide for those belongin' to me, thanks to nobody."

Taking out his pipe the old man knocked it free of ashes against the piazza rail, thrust it into his pocket and prepared to rise.

Penelope caught his hand desperately.

"It isn't alone because I want to earn my living, Grandfather, that I want to go to Boston," said she hurriedly. "I'm not happy. Please, *please* don't think that I am ungrateful, or that it is your fault. You do everything in the world for me and always have, and I do appreciate it. But the life here at home is so hard. Can't you see? Everybody in town watches and gossips about me and so do Aunt Martha and Aunt Elizabeth. They don't mean to and they wouldn't be unkind for the world. But they don't understand me and think me peculiar. So does everybody else in Belleport. I never can have a minute's freedom. Wherever I go somebody is sure to prance after me and want to know what I am doing. If I could get away where nobody knew me and where people had never heard of my engagement to Dick Morton —"

Once more the old suspicion crossed the Captain's mind and he shot a quick glance at her face from beneath his beetling brows.

"Young Morton's in Boston, ain't he?"

He saw a burning blush mount to the girl's forehead and instantly realized that she had read his thought.

"I suppose he is," confessed she coldly. "However, the city is large and it is unlikely we should meet, especially as we both would be working. And even if we did, what of that? We have met here in Belleport and have contrived to live in spite of it."

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She heard him breathe deeply.

"Then you're not —"

"In love with Dick now?" interposed Penelope calmly. "Not a bit, Grandfather. You need have no worries on that score. You did not for one moment suspect that I was pursuing Dick to Boston, did you?"

Again she heard him sigh—this time more profoundly.

"I didn't know what to think," was his candid answer.

"Women are strange critters an' this idea of yours for goin' to the city an' all is so queer an' sudden."

"It is not sudden with me," smiled Penelope. "I have been thinking about it for days. Of course if it would cost too much —"

"Pooh! I could manage that all right, if I set out to," retorted the Old Cap'n, drawing in his chin with the hauteur the girl herself often showed. "If once I made up my mind that the notion was the one for you to take up with, everything else could be fixed, I guess. It's what you'd do after you got to Boston that's puzzlin' me."

In the last sentence Penelope recognized success, and with a light of triumph in her eyes, dimpled. She did not, however, speak at once and when she did it was with a diffidence quite foreign to her.

"I think I could earn money by writing, Grandfather," said she in a low tone.

"Writin'! Writin' what? Letters an' such?"

"No, Grandfather, not letters — stories, books."

Captain Jabez started to reply but evidently found no fitting words in which to acclaim this preposterous suggestion.

"I have been writing some already here at home," continued Penelope, "and I believe I might do something really good if I had a quieter place to work."

"An' you think the city of Boston would be quieter than Belleport, eh?"

In spite of the derision in the words Penelope broke into a laugh.

"It does sound ridiculous, doesn't it?" confessed she with delightful good-humor. "What I really meant was that if I were by myself in Boston I should be less interrupted."

"Mebbe!" nodded Captain Jabez. "But who in heaven's name do you think would pay you any money for what you'd write?" queried he, blending ridicule with kindness.

The answer he received staggered him with its explicitness.

"Mr. Gordon Hamilton," returned Penelope softly.

CHAPTER XI

THE TRIUMPH OF PENELOPE

HAVING won her point Penelope, feverish to be gone, began to make ready for her departure into the great world. Her preparations were simple enough and consisted mainly in washing and mending her scanty wardrobe and making it as fresh and attractive as she could. She must not expect a trousseau for the city, that she realized, for her leaving home put sufficient burden on the family purse as it was. There were even moments when her conscience plagued her a trifle and she wondered if she were asking too much and just how much of an effort Grandfather Allen was making to gratify her wish. Was it really a tax on his income to let her go away?

However, youth is sanguine and, biased by her desires, she at length dismissed these thoughts.

Ever since her advent into the home had she not heard him grumble and plead poverty? And yet without deviation from their standard of modest comfort the household had lived on. His peevishness on this subject was chronic — simply a trait of character that carried with it no real significance. He always objected to spending money and detested being asked for it. Yet if one could summon the courage and place a cause before him in an appealing light, the sum desired was in the end produced and after the customary haggling, delivered up.

Hence there was nothing unusual in his casting cold

water over her proposal and after a few qualms of conscience the girl thought no more of his reluctance. She was going to Boston and in that exultant thought everything else was forgotten.

But her aunts, Penelope soon discovered, did not accept the plan with equal unconcern and pleasure.

"I should think Pa was plumb out of his mind to let that child go prancin' off alone to the city!" announced Elizabeth to Martha. "Why, I'd as soon blindfold her an' send her into a den of lions. What does she know about the world, a girl of her age?"

"It does seem pretty venturesome," was Martha's guarded response, trying as she always did to calm her excitable sister.

"Venturesome! I should say it did! It is a mad notion, if you was to ask my opinion. An' what's she goin' to do when she gets there, I'd like to know? Nothin'! Nothin' at all but fritter away all the money we have scrimped years to save."

"Oh, she won't stay long, likely," answered Martha soothingly. "She's just uneasy an' wants a change. I expect all young people go through a stage when they think they're goin' to set the world afire. Then they go out an' try doin' it, an' after findin' they're no great punkins, they come creepin' home again, convinced it's the best place on earth."

"Penelope won't," asserted Elizabeth not won over by Martha's comfortable generalizations. "Once she gets out from under this roof there'll be no coaxin' her back again. She's had this thing up her sleeve for a long time—I ain't sure but she's always had it—an' now she's contrived to wriggle Pa round to her point of view. How she ever did it beats me. To begin with, I don't see where he's goin' to get the money from."

"That's puzzled me some, too," Martha admitted

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thoughtfully. "I imagined he'd been kinder hard pushed for cash lately. Still, you never can tell with Pa. He's always on the verge of goin' to the poorhouse."

"Well, all I can say is I wouldn't durst ask him to let *me* go falutin' off to the city," sniffed Elizabeth. "I guess if I did he'd put a quietus on me pretty quick."

"You ain't Penelope's age, Eliza."

"No, I ain't," snapped her sister, "though I don't see as you've got cause to remind me of it, Martha."

"I warn't remindin' you of it. How silly! I just meant that it's the older heads that hold the brains."

"I s'pose Penelope will know more when she's my age," admitted Elizabeth, slightly mollified. "She's got to get her experience. That's what Pa keeps sayin' every time I try to talk him out of lettin' Penelope go. 'She's got to get her experience,' says he. I'm sure I don't know what she's been doin' up to now but gettin' experience. If I'd been through what she has, I should think I'd got a good deal. But you can't stir Pa. I never saw him so set about anything as he is on hurlin' that child to perdition. He's bound to let her go even if it breaks the bank to do it."

Although crudely expressed, the latter statement was truer than its framer imagined. All innocent of the power she wielded Penelope had used as an argument to gain her end the one magic plea her grandfather could not resist. He was not a whit interested in her having a career or earning money. In fact, penurious as he was, he greatly preferred to support her and have her remain to gladden the old house that fronted the bay.

But when she asserted she was not happy — ah, that was the lever that moved the rock of his resistance! He had toiled for years to give to the girl the happiness he not only felt to be her due but which he owed as an accumulative debt to her mother. Never until that obliga-

tion was wiped off the slate of his conscience would he be entirely at rest. But apparently he had failed. Penelope was not happy. Mere food and shelter was not enough. She exacted something more and he was determined that she should have it. Of the self-denial it entailed she should never know. Not only would it mean greater financial effort than she had any realization of; but more potent than this sordid consideration was the fact of losing her temporarily out of the home.

He would not have dreamed he could have become so dependent on the presence of any human being as he was on this wayward, incomprehensible, tantalizing granddaughter of his. She it was who set the color of his day, indicating by frown or smile whether there was to be cloud or sunshine. What would be his sky when she was gone? He trembled to think. But if Penelope was not happy that was enough. Every muscle must be strained, every agency called into operation to make her so. Not only was it his pleasure; it was a sacred obligation.

He could not, he justly admitted, blame the girl for being conscious of the village gossip. Though a man of peculiarly independent temperament his own pride had been stung by the slanders that had reached his ears and Penelope was only a woman and proud as he. What wonder that with her more sensitive nature she should prefer to flee rather than face public criticism as he was resolved to do? All women shrunk from being talked about. She would go away for a time and amid new scenes and other interests forget the censorious tongues of Belleport which, deprived of the stimulus of her presence, would gradually wag more slowly and at length be stilled. Then, after an interval, she would come home and begin life over again and perhaps the future chapters of her existence would be brighter ones. He prayed

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so. Into terms of such crude but affectionate philosophy did Captain Jabez reduce the aspirations of Penelope.

The tidings of the girl's approaching departure were not received by the hamlet, alas, with an equal degree of intelligence.

"What do you think!" commented Hepsey Bearse excitedly to the postmaster. "Penelope Turner's actually a-goin' chasin' Dick Morton up to Boston! Imagine the Allens lettin' her. What's come over 'em I don't understand. It's likely, though, they can't help it. She's a headstrong little minx."

"Oh, I don't believe she's trapsin' after Dick," retorted the other with masculine skepticism. "The Old Cap'n's got too much pride to stand for that. More likely she's goin' to the city to get wisened up same's the Kendrick girls did."

"Oh, Penelope don't need to go to college to get wise," Hepsey declared with an insinuating laugh. "She's knowin' enough as 'tis. Besides, it ain't the season of the year to be commencin' college."

Once Penelope would have cringed before such comment; but now borne upward on rosy clouds of anticipation she was so far aloft that the shafts of malice directed toward her failed to reach their goal.

Serenely she packed her possessions in the old-fashioned leather trunk banded to absurdity with hoops of steel, and laughing in triumph as the lock clicked, she helped her grandfather take the added precaution to cord it with rope. Then she put on her freshly ironed shirt-waist, her worn little coat and skirt of blue, and settling the hat with its tilting cornflowers jauntily on her head, tripped downstairs to bid good-by to her aunts.

"You're sure you put everything in your satchel, child?" questioned Aunt Martha. "Be careful of your tickets an' money. Remember you've got quite a little

fortune with you an' you mustn't go flourishin' your purse round on the train 'cause you never can tell who may be watchin'. An' don't forget to write every day or two an' let us know how you're makin' out. Since you like to write so much, letters ought to come easy."

"Tell us what they're wearin' in Boston," piped the more frivolous Elizabeth. "I'd like to hear somethin' of the styles first-hand."

Penelope smiled and nodded.

"Law, Eliza, how can you ask such a thing of the child? She won't be goin' to shops an' seein' fashions, busy as she'll be with her work. An' anyhow, it's a foolish waste of paper to be fillin' it up with such nonsense. What does it matter what they're wearin'? You can't have none of it," concluded the practical Martha.

"Well, I can read about it, can't I?" Elizabeth answered, trying valiantly not to be ruffled by the rebuke.

"I s'pose so — if you choose to use your eyesight that way," came sharply from her sister, "though why, at your age, you ain't outgrown such silliness I can't see. What good will it do you to hear what folks in Boston have on? By the time the letter gets here, they'll be togged out in somethin' else. You can't hope to keep up with 'em. I'd rather hear about what's goin' on — lectures, an' singin' an' sermons." Then, as if struck by a sudden thought, she added, "You'll go to church, Penelope, same's you do at home."

"Yes."

"That's right. We all would want you should."

Elizabeth, who seemed to feel she had not been granted her full share in admonishments, now put in:

"An' don't go eatin' any new-fangled food made of goodness only knows what. Nothin' will make you sick quicker'n that."

The rattle of the stage came nearer and there was a

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cry of warning from Captain Jabez, who, stationed for the last half-hour on the steps, was standing guard over the shabby trunk.

"Come on, Penelope," he called through the window. "Seth's here with the wagon. Now, Eliza, don't you an' Martha backen her by talkin'. She's got her ticket to buy an' her trunk to check an' there ain't any too much time. Kiss your aunts, child, an' nip right along."

The little ceremony of farewell was characteristically stiff and brief. With obvious embarrassment Penelope brushed the cheek of each of the women with her lips, and as much relieved as they that the rite was over, sprang blushing into the waiting vehicle beside her grandfather.

"You'll remember about writin'," called Martha.

"Yes."

"An' lockin' up your money."

"Yes."

Elizabeth glanced at her sister and then, edging desperately to the margin of the piazza, she called confidentially:

"If you should be where there's any samples, Penelope —"

But Martha had heard.

"Samples!" ejaculated she. "Why, anybody'd think the girl was goin' to Boston on a shoppin' trip."

"But I only said if she *happened* to be where there were any," Elizabeth whimpered. "Sometimes you can get pieces that do nicely for needlebooks an' the like."

"I'll try to do everything," responded Penelope across the widening distance.

She looked back and waved her hand.

On the steps stood her two aunts too busily engaged in quarreling to notice her.

"They're havin' one of their spats," grunted her grand-

father. "Martha's probably sayin' it ain't moral to use the samples you pay nothin' for to make needlebooks."

Which in point of fact was exactly the case and proved how well the Old Captain knew his daughters. It was also characteristic of him that he raised no objection to the gratuitous needlebooks.

CHAPTER XII

A RED-LETTER DAY

BEFORE a great flat-topped desk littered with papers, Gordon Hamilton sat tilted back in his revolving chair. A haze of cigarette smoke, filmy as mist and fragrant as a breath from the Orient, clouded the room which although businesslike in equipment was not the barren interior so characteristic of offices. On the contrary a richly toned rug covered the floor, and upon the tinted walls, banded about in uniform frames of black, hung several large water-colors, proof drawings for book-cover designs or illustrations. There were, too, autographed photographs of several distinguished writers bearing the typical friendly greeting; and in low book-cases that ran about three sides of the room, gay-hued volumes, stamped with the imprint of Beck and Hamilton, were arranged in symmetrical rows.

The desk, however, occupied the center of the room and the light that poured in upon it through the broad window overlooking the city street fell full upon Mr. Gordon Hamilton himself, who sat intently reading a sheaf of crisp white manuscript. Far into the morning he had read and had the truth been known, far into the night before — a crime which in recent years his eyesight had forbidden. The reading of manuscript was frightfully taxing on the eyes.

Nevertheless on this occasion his gaze dwelt unblinkingly on the pages he held in his hand. With eagle alertness it traveled along and one sheet after another was

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placed face down on the accumulating pile at his elbow, until only a few remained which he devoured avidly as if he feared to be interrupted before he should have done with them. Only once did he pause, and that was to glance irritably at the clock above his desk; then, satisfied, he returned with greed to his papers. At last, with a reluctant yawn, he put down the final page, rose, thrust his hands into his pockets and laughed a delighted laugh; afterward he took a few turns across the room as if to relax muscles that had for some time been tense.

"Jove!" exclaimed he aloud. "Penelope Turner, eh? Penelope Turner!" Musingly he repeated the name, speaking each syllable of it slowly. Then he sat down again in his mahogany chair and touched a bell.

"Ask Mr. Rollins to come here a moment," said he to Miss Stevens, his secretary.

Rollins, the head reader, came, a clean-shaven young college man, high-browed and wearing shell-rimmed spectacles.

"What do you know of a Penelope Turner, Rollins? Anything?"

"Penelope Turner!" repeated the subordinate thoughtfully. "I do not recall the name at all, Mr. Hamilton."

"You don't remember ever having had a manuscript of hers?"

"No, sir."

Hamilton drummed meditatively on his desk with his long fingers.

"U—m!"

"Something may have been sent in, however, and been turned down before it got to me," suggested Rollins, noting the gathering frown of his employer and speaking hastily.

"That is very unlikely," replied the junior member of the firm, with a shake of his head. "No story of Penel-

ope Turner's would ever have been turned down, once it reached these offices, young man."

"Why not speak to some of the others? They may recollect the name. Or it may be on file. We file a record of all submitted manuscripts if they show any promise at all. Often it is useful."

"Hunt through your card catalogue, then, and see what information you can get. Also inquire of the staff in the editorial office. Penelope Turner is the name — Miss Penelope Turner of Pinckney Street."

Nodding, Rollins went out, and, after he had gone, Hamilton lighted a fresh cigarette, puffed at it viciously and regarded the ceiling through half-closed lids. He was extraordinarily puzzled. The manuscript had been sent to him marked *Personal* and he did not in the least understand it. Manuscripts never came to him and but for the novelty of receiving this one he never would have read it so promptly. But the first line had caught his attention, the second had held it and by the time he had reached the third he was as powerless to lay aside the story as a child is to part from Goldenlocks and the Three Bears.

Still pondering, Hamilton began to whistle in subdued, semi-conscious fashion.

Where in thunder was Rollins? It took him an outrageously long time to go through those lists of his.

"Well?" demanded he the instant the young man was inside the door.

"I have not been able to trace Miss Turner at all, Mr. Hamilton. The name is entirely new to us. None of the readers have ever heard it, and it is not in the files."

A light, jubilant laugh came from Hamilton.

"A new one, eh? Dropped without warning from the clouds."

"That depends on the manuscript," retorted the reader with a touch of humor.

"Oh, don't you fret! The story is heaven-sent, all right," Gordon Hamilton asserted. "It is the real thing—a find—a corker! This is a red-letter day for us, Rollins. We've struck a best seller and something tells me it is her first."

His eyes shone with excitement.

"If she is only starting and can do the thing again, her fortune is made and ours, too, incidentally. And even if she can't repeat the offense it is something to have committed the crime once. Given the proper advertising the book should bring a landslide. Here, take it with you and let me have your opinion. You'll see that it needs some editing. There is the novice's waste of words here and there, but that is of minor importance. The thing is the yarn itself and that is as gripping and vivid as you could ask."

"Then you have already decided to publish it?" smiled the reader.

"Well, *rather!* It is going to be the star of our Christmas firmament. You will say so too, or I'm mistaken. Go ahead and get at it. I want to know how it strikes you."

"Now?"

"Certainly now."

"But I am editing that set of Rogers' essays."

"Damn Rogers! He can wait. He never sells more than a thousand, anyway. Let Miss Danforth finish up the book. She can do it all right or find somebody else who can. But you take this manuscript and go to it. Make corrections as you go along, for since Miss Penelope Turner has come to stay, it will save time."

"What's the title of the story?" asked Rollins, as Hamilton gathered up and straightened the uneven sheets.

"*Granite and Clay!* That's not so bad! However, we can decide on the title later. The story is the thing now."

Rollins took the manuscript, a glow of his employer's enthusiasm reflected on his face. Both men were as eager as dogs upon the scent.

"You might tell them when you get back to the editorial rooms that we've found the treasure we have been after the whole year," remarked Hamilton. "It will cheer everybody up."

Left alone, Hamilton reseated himself and presently again touched the bell beside his desk.

"Miss Stevens, I want you to take down a letter and get it right off," said he to his secretary. "But perhaps before you do that you might call *Information* and find out whether there is a telephone at 378 Pinckney Street. If there is, get the number."

He turned toward the pile of envelopes that littered his desk.

"There will be other letters to answer, too," he added. "I didn't get at them earlier in the day — thanks to Miss Penelope Turner. Well, she's worth it, anyhow — every whit worth it."

He glanced over letter after letter.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Hamilton," Miss Stevens said re-entering, "but there is no telephone at 378 Pinckney Street."

"Then we shall have to send a letter and invite the young lady to come in person and talk with us."

The secretary sat down and drew her typewriter toward her.

"She may not be young, sir," smiled she. Miss Stevens had been so many years in Mr. Hamilton's employ that she ventured an occasional jest.

"Old or young — it doesn't matter," was the response.

"She's the real stuff and I say unto you that there is not greater rejoicing among the angels over the sinner that repenteth than there is right here in this office over this same Miss Penelope Turner."

The telephone jangled and Hamilton caught up the receiver.

"Mr. Wilmot? Yes, I'll see him. Send him up." He set the instrument down hurriedly. "Now rush this letter through before he comes, Miss Stevens. Tell Miss Turner that if convenient I should like to have her come to see me to-morrow at eleven o'clock. Make it courteous and cordial. I'll leave that to you. And if she can't come to-morrow ask her to let me know when she will have leisure to call."

"Yes, sir."

"That is all for the present. We shall have to leave these letters until after luncheon."

"Very well, Mr. Hamilton."

As she opened the door to pass out it was held for her by an entering visitor. Broad-shouldered and powerful, he moved with the military swing and freedom of one whose muscles are in perfect training. He had a bronzed face, piercing eyes and a small, close-cut mustache that added a grim, almost severe touch to his countenance, but notwithstanding his austerity, the gesture with which he greeted the stenographer and waited for her to pass displayed the courtliness and ease that proclaimed not only social training but a reverence for all womanhood as well.

"I have no earthly business to be bothering you in working hours, old man," began he, when the door was closed and the two friends were alone together. "But I happened to be near here and I couldn't resist dropping in to see what had become of you."

"I'm mighty glad you did," answered Hamilton with

heartiness. "There's no one on earth I'd rather see. Sit down. How do you find the world now that you are home from France and back in the traces?"

"Damn stupid, Gordon — if you're asking to know," Mr. Wilmot replied. "Try as I will I simply cannot seem to take up life again. Most of the men who went across make the same complaint. That three years played the devil with existence. You just cannot piece the threads together. Margaret's raising the same wail. It was her first taste of something outside Vincent Club theatricals and Copley Plaza balls and since her return she has been restless as a caged lioness. I actually don't know what I am going to do with her. She persists in declaring that she is going to get a job — and I do not know but she will yet, in spite of all my protests. There really is no reason why she shouldn't, except that I hate the idea of it."

"You dislike breaking a precedent, eh, Billy?"

Wilmot laughed good-humoredly.

"I fancy that is about it," laughed he. "We Bostonians usually do. You see none of the women of our family ever did earn their living. Nevertheless, there always has to be a first time, I suppose, and since the war just about all our established codes have gone by the board. In many instances it has been a good thing too. Still, say what you may, present-day conditions do jolt some of us old conservatives. I feel irritated the whole time. It's a foolish state of mind, I know, for the past will never return — never. We have begun another chapter of history and like it or not we must go on with it. Whether it will be better or worse than our former ones remains to be seen."

"Many persons in the world would term this sensation you call a jolt progress," laughed Gordon Hamilton.

"I know that's the name the youngsters give it," came

dryly from Wilmot. "I had a chance to learn their lingo while I was in Europe. You cannot command a regiment without finding out about your men and what they think. I'm not complaining of them, mind, for they were as fine a lot of boys as you would ask to see, corking chaps, every one of them! I was mighty proud of them. And there was more to it than pride, too, for when you go through a hell like that together you establish a pretty firm fellowship with your comrades. We had it rough and it drew those of us who came out of the scrimmage mighty close together. Since I got home my boys have kept turning up at the house or the office just to renew old times. You can't talk the war with people who weren't in it. In the first place it bores them stiff, and in the next they don't know anything about it. But let some of your own command blow in and you are back in France in a second. When I was over there I thought I never should wish to mention those terrible and tragic days again. But now that they are over I find a morbid sort of pleasure in reviewing them. They weren't so bad in spite of their hardships." He paused musingly, then continued:

"Margaret has a string of over-sea friends, too — men she met at her canteen. I always can tell when she has seen one of them for she is in the highest of spirits afterward."

"She always seems in the highest of spirits to me," ventured Hamilton, glancing out of the window with studied carelessness.

"Oh, she's generally pretty even-tempered," was Wilmot's response. "But since she got home she has been less so than usual. She may have overworked in France. Goodness knows, she kept at it with an energy I wouldn't have believed she possessed."

There was a moment of quiet and above the droning

hum of the city street the clock above Hamilton's desk ticked noisily.

"When does the wedding come off?" Gordon inquired, searching elaborately in his pocket for his cigarette case.

Wilmot hesitated.

"Oh — eh — in the fall, I rather think," he answered. "There are no definite plans as yet, however. I am not anxious to hurry matters, you may be sure of that. Peggy is the only pal I have and when she goes —"

"But I thought you said Lambeth was to give up the London business and come here — that it was one of the conditions on which you consented to the match."

"Oh, there's no hitch about that. Archie has agreed to come all right and take out his citizen papers too. Peggy isn't going to leave the country. On the other hand, she isn't going to want to live with her old dad when once she is married, I know that. She will want a home of her own. All girls do."

"Perhaps not."

"But she will, I tell you. I know something of women," asserted Wilmot, toying moodily with his watch fob. "She will want her own things and her independence. It is perfectly natural. And if she doesn't, Lambeth will. If he gives up everything and comes over here to marry her, something will be due him."

"I suppose so," Hamilton admitted.

"You must remember that it is a mighty condescension for an Englishman born and bred in London to tear up and come to America to live, anyway — especially one who is not young any more."

"He is Margaret's senior, isn't he!" commented Hamilton. "I keep forgetting that. Sometimes I have thought it odd that she should care for a man so much older than herself."

"Oh, it came about naturally enough," was the tranquil response. "You see, her mother's death threw her with me from the time she was a child. We became great chums and I'm afraid that quite unconsciously I cut her off from making younger friends. Where I went she went, and as a result her circle of acquaintances became more or less limited to the persons whom I knew. She was always a rather shy, grave little thing who did not care much for frivolity. I fairly had to push her to join in with her own set. She'd rather be with the old folks and with me. Consequently it followed that whenever we were in London she saw a great deal of Lambeth and also when he came here for he usually stayed at the house. He is an attractive chap — one whose attentions would be flattering to any woman. I suppose they were to Margaret. There is no denying the match pleased me at the time, for Archie is a clever fellow and knows the ins and outs of the company from A to Z. I figure that if he came over here I could take him into partnership and he could relieve me of some of the office routine." Mr. Wilmot tapped the toe of his boot reflectively with the stick he carried.

"But during the last two years, Gordon, I have sometimes wondered if I did right to bring about the engagement — for I'll admit I did bring it about. At eighteen a girl is almost too young to know her own mind and be intelligent as to whom she wants to marry. Besides, Margaret had seen very few men. These international marriages do not always turn out well, either. The very fundamentals of the parties are different. Then, too, since the war I have found myself becoming keener on my own countrymen. I did not half appreciate what a fine lot of young thoroughbreds we were raising in America until I saw some of them up against it. You cannot match them the world over. I have one of them

with me now down at State Street learning high finance, a boy from the Cape, who, although he has not a cent to his name, has a brain that is better than money. Unless I have lost my youthful skill at picking a winner, he is going to land at the top some day."

"He isn't the fellow who came back on the steamer with you?"

"Why, yes!" nodded Wilmot, his face lighting with pleasure. "You met him at the dock the day you came to welcome us home, didn't you?"

"No, but I knew some man was with you and Margaret. He was busy chasing up trunks."

Wilmot laughed.

"I'll bet he was, the young beggar!" chuckled he. "You can count on Dick being Johnnie on the spot every time. You know it was he who performed the impossible and rescued Margaret from that bombing outrage at Neuilly. I told him afterward that I should never forget it and I do not mean to. Anything that money, opportunity, or influence can accomplish shall be his."

"Of your two creditors I should pronounce him the greater."

"In contrast with the Englishman, you mean? Well, rather! The American has earned his reward while the Britisher, in true English fashion, only gets his good fortune by right of inheritance."

"How do you think Peggy feels about Lambeth?"

Hamilton's sharp scrutiny was directed to his friend's countenance.

"Oh, I guess Peggy is contented enough. She does not seem possessed of any of my qualms — or if she is she conceals it nicely. Lambeth saw us off at Southhampton when we sailed for home and everything was merry as a marriage bell. But he has aged a lot since the war.

Jove! I was shocked to see the change in him. You know he was stationed at some munitions post near the front. The experience must have taken hold of him frightfully for he looks ten years older than I, instead of being ten years my junior."

Wilmot rose from the leather chair in which he had been sitting.

"I don't know why I bother you with all this guff, Gordon," said he apologetically. "It is not my custom to unload my personal worries on you in such selfish fashion. But you knew Alice, poor girl, and were fond of her; and I know you care a lot for Margaret."

"God knows I do!" Hamilton burst out and then, biting his lips, he colored.

"She's tremendously fond of you, too, Gordon," replied Mr. Wilmot serenely, noting neither the other's confusion nor the flush that had mounted to his forehead. "Of all my friends she likes you best."

There was no response.

"And that reminds me," went on the speaker briskly, "that I am almost forgetting to deliver her message. She wanted me to ask you to dine with us to-morrow evening."

Gordon Hamilton's face became radiant, then clouded as Wilmot added:

"She is having my protégé from the office, I believe, and some men she met over-seas."

"I am afraid —" began Hamilton. But his friend checked him.

"Oh, come now," interpolated he, "do not disappoint the child — and her dad, too. You have hardly been to see us since we got home, Gordon. I guess you can spare one evening."

"I've been busy," was the lame explanation.

"Busy? That is all rot! Don't tell me you work

nights as well as days, for I know better. What on earth can keep you so busy at home?"

"I read manuscript until two o'clock last evening," was the retort, made with self-conscious dignity.

"Great Scott! Isn't such devotion to literature something new?"

"Why — eh — yes. I don't often keep at it so steadily nowadays," answered Hamilton lightly.

Billy Wilmot, however, took the matter seriously, saying with genuine concern:

"You'll have to stop a practice like that, old chap. It's too much of a good thing. Nobody can burn the candle at both ends. The next thing you know you will be breaking down, going blind, and becoming old before your time."

"I'm old already, Billy," Hamilton asserted sadly.

"Nonsense! *Nonsense!* You? Why, you are in the very prime of life. What are you talking about? I am sure I do not consider myself old and I have a three years' start of you."

"Years do not constitute age."

"You're right there," agreed Wilmot promptly.

"Nevertheless, they have a darn lot to do with it. In my opinion, however, the printer's strike has more to do with your sudden antiquity than anything else."

Hamilton smiled at the shrewdness of the observation.

"Perhaps it has," admitted he.

"Are you still holding out for the open shop?"

"You bet your life!"

"That's right! Stick to it. It is sure to come. So far as I'm concerned, I would rather go without almost anything than yield to those fellows. It is not that I want to beat them. It is their un-Americanism that gets me. They are trying to shackle everybody's freedom and do away with the liberty of the individual, and hav-

ing a Plymouth Rock ancestry, I've no use for such a creed."

"I'm not strong for it either."

"Well, I admire your nerve in fighting for a principle. If every employer would be equally disinterested and self-sacrificing there would soon be an end to this tyranny. Now about Peggy's dinner — you will come, won't you?"

"Yes, thank you."

"Bravo! That's the stuff, old man!"

"At what time do you dine?"

"Seven-thirty."

"I'll be on hand, Billy."

"That's fine! And you will let up on reading manuscript all night, won't you?" pleaded Wilmot with affectionate solicitude.

"Yes, I give you my word that for the present I won't take home another thing," was Hamilton's reply. A whimsical smile lingered on his lips. He could afford to make the glib promise. Penelope Turner would not be submitting another story immediately.

CHAPTER XIII

TANGLED WEBS

THE Wilmot house, a residence of mellowed red brick with trimmings of green and an entrance whose prim paneling and fan-shaped glass was reminiscent of colonial Boston, stood near the head of Chestnut Street. Through a vista of similar doorways one glimpsed at the foot of the hill the dancing blue of the river and at sunset, against a glory of crimson, the bridge that spanned it. But the bridge with its rush of traffic was so distant as to be only viewed in miniature; and the nearby houses, like protecting bulwarks, walled out the din of the city's turmoil until nothing but its rumbling echoes stole in to drone a faint accompaniment to the stillness brooding over the place. Nevertheless, despite its seclusion, Chestnut Street was not actually cut off from the whirl of present-day life for before many an old-time residence motor cars panted, and fashionably dressed men and women peopled the sidewalks.

Indeed there was an odd incongruity between the mansions and those who dwelt within them. An onlooker might well have declared hoops and stiff brocades, cocked hats and powdered coiffures fitter company for such a setting. And if the exteriors of the houses were thus at odds with their owners how much more justly did the interiors, with their inviting Chippendale sofas, gate-legged tables, canopied beds and cupboards crowded with pink luster, merit the criticism. Possibly beneath this

atmosphere of perpetuated antiquity there may, to be honest, have lurked a certain degree of the artificial, but if so the artistry creating it was cunningly, even reverently employed.

It was in such a home as this that Margaret Wilmot lived. She had always lived there and her father and mother, her grandfather and grandmother before her. There had never been a time since the house was built that some descendant of Peter Wilmot had not trodden the broad, white-banistered stairway; lingered beneath the great branching chandelier of crystal; or sat at the head of the dim mahogany dining-table. It was not alone for its history, however, that Margaret loved the stately old house. Ever since she could remember she had presided over it, taking care that the brasses, worn to satin smoothness by cycles of polishing, were always bright; that the dark wood of the furniture showed no dust; that flowers filled the vases; and that the freshness and daintiness which had been her mother's delight reigned throughout the home.

For the training to assume these unlooked-for duties the girl had her parents' conservatism to thank. Hers had been the austere education of the New England housewife, and in consequence from the time she was a child she was able to bake and brew, stitch and seam, sweep and dust. The fact that there were in the household several family servants who had been handed down from one generation to another had not been permitted to act as a hindrance to the program the mother had so conscientiously outlined.

Hence it followed that when affliction came with ghostly footfall to the old Beacon Hill dwelling and the daughter was left to preside over her father's table, she slipped into the niche with an ease and dignity far in advance of her years. To her father her poise and quiet

capability came as a shock, bringing with it the initial realization that the child he had petted, played with, and indulged was in reality a woman. The two had always been congenial companions but now, under the poignancy of a great sorrow, they turned to each other in far closer and more intimate comradeship than ever before. In fact, there was pathos in the helplessness with which the man, formerly so strong and self-sufficient, clung to his child. She became his solace from loneliness; the primary interest of his life. The State Street office, which during his wife's life had to a great extent absorbed him, now became important only as it ministered to Margaret's needs and assured her of financial tranquillity for the future. Had it not been for the war's masterly sweeping aside of personal interests Wilmot might have remained the recluse he was fast becoming. But his country called, and like the others of his race and generation he answered that cry with all he had,—his fortune, his career, even his child. He was not so old but that a former military training won him a place with the armies in France, and leaving his business in the care of subordinates, he sailed with his daughter from America.

The girl was both mature and executive and as she also spoke French readily she had no difficulty in finding a position with the Red Cross in Paris. It seemed a post sheltered enough, yet one of undeniable usefulness; and her father had left her there with a sigh of thankfulness that although he was lending his dearest possession to the cause of liberty, he was not being called upon to sacrifice it. As for his own part in the coming struggle he did not anticipate encountering actual danger. The front-line trenches were miles away and while he did not shrink from peril there seemed slight prospect that his regiment would be sent forward.

When, however, Destiny's veil was lifted she showed a

very different face from the one William Wilmot had pictured. She seemed like a goddess who, angered by half-hearted devotion, now grimly demanded that he who knelt before her shrine offer up all that he had withheld. Wilmot's own life was nothing. That he was ordered into action and faced the inevitable knowledge that there was but scant chance of his return troubled him not a whit. It was only on his child's account that he dreaded the possible issue.

But when he learned that Margaret, who like himself had dedicated her life to the nation, must leave her position of safety and confront inescapable danger, his anguish of soul was scarcely to be endured.

Why had he brought her across the sea, he asked himself for the hundredth time. It had not been compulsory that she should come. In fact, both of them might perfectly well have remained on American soil. And then, even as he made the declaration, he knew that neither of them could have remained and been content.

"I am only a woman, Dad; but like you I am an American and I must go!"

Ah, her cry had been the cry of the Wilmot blood! A son of his, had heaven blessed him with one, would have answered thus, and in lieu of the son the daughter had spoken. Margaret Wilmot would have rated herself a craven to have tarried at home in safety while the land that had given her birth cried for aid. And so he had kissed her and hand in hand they had set forth for France. If neither of them ever returned, so be it. Or God was good if He but let her remain. But should it fall to Wilmot's lot to come back alone — ah, that was a thing unthinkable! He prayed on his knees, he beseeched, that he might be spared such a blow. And he had been spared. Heaven had been merciful and although calamity had threatened and even come so close

that its breath had scorched, its touch had been averted by the heroism of Richard Morton.

Could the father ever cease to bless that name? Was existence long enough, or the gifts he had to bestow great enough ever to cancel the debt such a service entailed? Then and there Wilmot had registered a vow that so long as life remained to him the deed this man had wrought should be remembered with gratitude.

And he had been true to his word. The war had ended and on the same boat with the reunited father and daughter Dick Morton had sailed for America; and if those long days of companionship at sea worked ill rather than good, who was to blame? Surely not the Colonel who foresaw no possible harm in this intimacy with the young captain who served under him. Surely not Margaret herself, pledged to a distant lover. Surely not Richard Morton, devoted to his superior, all homage and respect to the daughter, and hastening home to the woman who awaited his coming. None of the three could be held responsible for the pranks Fate played.

Chance, however, with malicious eye, saw them his dupes and laughed; and when the ship that bore them hither reached her destination, the trio parted thoughtfully, each meditating in secret on what was and what might have been. They were innocent enough imaginings, only backward glances tinged with shadowy regret, — a regret too vague to be formulated, and that merely lurked like a specter in the subconscious. Each was happy in his hopes for the future and loyal to them; and each struggled to stifle as unworthy any suggestion of dissatisfaction or unrest at the burden his fetters imposed.

Colonel Wilmot had never before experienced the slightest disquietude concerning Margaret's approaching marriage to Archibald Lambeth. Not only had the two men been business associates over a span of years but

they were warm friends as well. Barring the difference in years, there was not an objection to be raised against the match; and in the face of the girl's maturity that flaw seemed only a slight one.

Then the war, that melting-pot of race and creed and sect; that leveler of wealth and rank; that mighty creator of fellowship had come, and with its camaraderie and freer mingling of the sexes a new Margaret Wilmot had emerged. Uneasily the father studied his child. How would she wear the old bonds now? And was she prepared to make good the promises she had uttered before her reincarnation? To the anxious parent the future presented a far less serene aspect than it had done before this drastic upheaval.

If, however, Margaret shared her father's misgivings she at least betrayed no sign. Perhaps she herself was unable to analyze the magic wrought by the hitherto unknown contact of youth with youth. All she sensed was that she was exhilarated by an overwhelming gladness; that she exulted in a fresh beauty of the universe; and looked with awakened vision on life and its potentialities. The portals that had formerly shut her within herself were rent asunder and with a resurrection of body, mind, and soul she had stepped forth with the wide-eyed wonder of the newly born.

She now saw youth with the eagerness of youth; she delighted in her womanhood with its wealth of beauty and charm; she thrilled under strange pulsations of sex. She had gone to France a child and blind; she had returned a woman, seeing.

And hand in hand with this realization of her powers had come the desire to use them. She hungered to mingle in the onrushing current of affairs as she had during the war. Ah, that sensation of being busy, and useful, *and wholesomely tired* — how satisfying it was! And

the joy of looking into other eyes, young like her own, and seeing reflected in them the same haunting but elusive hopes and dreams she experienced! The wonder of it banished every other thought. As for Richard Morton, she did not consciously connect him with the miracle that had taken place within her. He was only a factor in the engulfing and transforming tide. Thus in all sincerity reasoned Margaret Wilmot.

And Richard himself argued in something the same fashion. The war had been a mighty adventure whose mark would ever rest upon him. Those who had not shared in it were like men treading the earth with bandaged eyes and ears that were stopped. They would never know nor could words paint for them the horrors, griefs, beauties, glories, that he and his comrades had beheld. It was as if one had stood upon a mountain peak and looked down on the world with its brutality, its cruelty, its selfishness, its patience, its heroism and its God-given love. What marvel that a gulf yawned twixt those who had glimpsed this wonder and those who had not? It was only natural that he should gravitate toward those who had been granted the great revelation. The Wilmots were of his kin. That was why he delighted in them. No disloyalty to Penelope mixed with his affection for these new friends. Was he not returning to her? And was she not the woman of his choice?

He could not, to be sure, regard her quite as he did those who had been through the tragedy in which he had played a part. She, together with every one else in the tiny hamlet where he had been born seemed like children to whom the realities of life were a closed book. Of course they were not to blame for this; nevertheless it was unavoidable that he should regard them with pity and a degree of patronage. Belleport seemed a realm asleep when contrasted with the vividness and turmoil of

the land he had left behind. How trivial its little self-centered round of interest! How cramped its outlook!

With the cries of a destitute and suffering universe still ringing in his ears; with the specters of nakedness and famine before his eyes until he could scarcely sleep at night he had returned to Penelope, and in her mistaken grief how petty her attitude had appeared! Why, she might have been accomplishing endless good during those idle hours of mourning! The world need was great and time all too short to repair the ravages the conflict had wrought. With every back bent to the burden there were none too many to help. And Penelope had wasted precious hours, days, months! Before he realized it his wrath and scorn had burst bounds and he had voiced a denunciation that he could not with honesty disclaim.

Afterward in soberer mind he had cursed himself roundly for the words he had spoken. How was a girl to know of the hell to which she might have extended a succoring hand? It was unjust to expect it. All America was as ignorant as she. It ate, drank, piped and danced with as much abandon as if there were no such things as children without food; families without homes; women bereft of husbands and sons. If those of broad intelligence, if even government officials lacked a realization of what humanity had undergone, what right had he to accuse a girl of Penelope's limited vision of ignorance? He had been grossly unfair.

Nevertheless there were women who, like pure-eyed angels, had looked on the world as it was and had seen the good and evil without having their shining robes sullied. Margaret Wilmot was one of those. She understood. He wished Penelope had been willing to listen instead of being angered at his censure. But she had proudly dismissed him without lending ear to his apol-

ogies or arguments, and while her treatment of him still rankled, and the sting of mortification still throbbed, in his heart of hearts Richard Morton knew not whether to be glad or sorry for the freedom she had given him.

CHAPTER XIV

PEGGY

ON the evening of her dinner party Margaret Wilmot stood alone in the living room of the old Chestnut Street house, arranging in a great luster pitcher an armful of Ophelia roses. Already the interior, glowing softly in the light from the shaded candles and a rosy reflection from the hearth, was fragrant with their perfume.

The girl was in white with arms and neck bare, and about her firm throat a curious necklace of topaz, whose facets caught and held the firelight, flashed and sparkled. She was not pretty and yet she made a beautiful picture standing against the golden brown of the hangings. For the moment she was smiling with a faint, upward curve of lips that smiled rarely and therefore with the more fascination. Brow and eyes were grave, however, and even the hair, primly parted and coiled in a heavy knot at the back of her head, lent a Spartan simplicity that appealed because of its very demureness.

If contrasted with a woman of fashion, the severity of her ensemble, paradoxical as it may seem, instead of rendering her inconspicuous would have made her noticeable, almost striking; and yet had an artist been asked to choose between the two types there is little question which he would have favored, especially in the present setting.

For the room — quiet, dim and austere — called for that which was plain and elegant rather than that which

was ornate. The old desk lightened by mellowed brasses, the chairs with erect banister backs, the tall clock whose dial was ivory-tinted with the years all carried with them an atmosphere of age and self-respect; so, too, did the tiers of leather-backed books that lined the walls and mounted row upon row to the low ceiling. Possibly the interior might have been too severe had it not borrowed a touch of warmth from the Bokhara rugs, a few scattered bronzes, a photograph or two framed in silver, a delightfully feminine silk work-bag that dangled from the back of one of the chairs, and the azaleas pink with bloom that filled the many-paned windows.

Palms breathing of the tropics and yet as prim as the little drop-leaved table that held the card tray stood in the hall; and between the portières one caught a glimpse of carved Jacobean chairs, a chest of bronzed cedar heavily banded with metal; and the broad spiral stairway that circled upward and disappeared in a series of airy curves to the floor above. Here in the hall also hung the coat-of-arms of the Wilmots and the sampler of poor little Jane Morse, Margaret's great-grandmother, who although a blameless child of six had affixed to her alphabet a supplication to the Lord to save her erring soul.

The dining room seen through the distant alcove was gay with flowers, silver and snowy napery, and moving noiselessly about, putting the final touches to the table, was an aged butler who seemed part and parcel of the establishment and who handled each bit of china with the affection of a connoisseur. Many a year had Crapson cared for that old Sèvres and in spite of the myriad times it had graced the board it was his boast that not a piece of it had ever been chipped, much less broken. Had it been human and of his blood he could not have cherished it more tenderly. His motions were slower now than in the past, for age had stiffened his once lithe

figure; nevertheless, there was still in his pose the precision of the servant trained to his calling and proud to excel in it. It was not toward him, therefore, that Margaret cast fluttering glances of apprehension when she entered, but rather toward the pert little waitress who in stiffly starched apron and cap followed him about and listened with uptilted chin and obvious boredom to his admonitions concerning the plates and silver. The maid was of a generation to whom old Sèvres and Paul Revere silver meant nothing; neither did the military straightness of knives and spoons, nor the accurate placing of wine glasses. Instead her mind was occupied with Jim, the good-looking teamster, and what she should wear to the Clan-na-Gael ball, and if in the meantime a bit of the egg-shell porcelain had slipped through her fingers, her heart would have throbbed no quicker or her sleep been a whit the lighter. But with Margaret and Crapson it was different. They had grown up on Beacon Hill.

Therefore, although the mistress of the mansion smiled with condescension toward the youthful interloper in her trim attire, every hint of patronage vanished when she turned toward Crapson.

"How pretty the table looks!" exclaimed she. "You have the place cards right?"

"Yes, Miss Peggy."

(Few persons were privileged to call Margaret by her childhood name.)

"Mr. Hamilton at your right, Mr. Morton at your left, Miss Sears and Miss Endicott beside your father and the other guests as you had them on the list."

The girl beamed with affection into the old man's face.

"Of course it is right. I need not have troubled to ask, for I never knew you to blunder, Crapson."

At the words a flush of pleasure stole into the man's cheek and the upstart in gray alpaca, apparently taking

unto herself something the words implied, sniffed and, with a toss of her head, disappeared through the swinging doors.

Margaret laughed, then at a rattle of the front door she hurriedly sped through the hall.

"Oh, Dad, how nice of you to come home early!" she exclaimed, as her father entered.

Stooping, Mr. Wilmot took her face between his hands, kissed her twice on the lips and then held her off at arm's length.

"My, my! How fine we look!" he cried.

"You like it?"

She glanced shyly down at her frock.

"I should say I did! A Paris trophy?"

The girl nodded.

"A rather expensive trophy, too, I'm afraid, Dad."

"One of those perfectly plain little sockdolagers, eh?" laughed her father. "Well, I guess the exchequer can stand it. Did the flowers come and were they what you wanted, kitten?"

"Yes, dear; they were lovely. But you needn't have sent so many roses."

"Oh, I threw in those Ophelias. They had just come in and were so fresh and perfect that I could not resist adding them to the order. I knew you liked them."

"I love them," was the quiet answer.

"They always make me think of you, Peggy. I don't know why," said the man, drawing her toward him and touching her hair.

For a moment she let her cheek rest against his; then raising her head she said:

"I'm so glad Gordon is coming to-night. We haven't seen him for an age."

"Yes," was the dubious reply. "I don't think he was keen on it, though. He is getting to be a genuine re-

cluse, keeps his nose down to the grindstone most of the time. I'm afraid. It is getting to be so impossible to drag him out for an evening that you may well consider yourself honored by his presence, my dear. I cannot understand what has come over him of late for he used to be a great gadabout. Since his mother's death, however, he seems to have dropped out of almost everything." Wilmot sighed thoughtfully. "Poor chap! He must be lonely as the deuce rattling round in that great Beacon Street house. I wonder that he keeps it."

Margaret did not reply.

"Sometimes I think all he does it for is to provide a home for Catherine, Roberts and the rest of his mother's old servants. They have all been in the family about a hundred years and what they would do if tipped out into the world I cannot imagine. Why, Catherine must have lived with the Hamiltons upwards of forty years and by this time ceased to remember she ever had any other home. Gordon's sense of obligation is something tremendous and he has too much sentiment to forget what she and the others did for his mother. So far as that goes, I cannot picture myself turning Crapson out of doors, either."

Margaret's lips parted into a smile of amusement as if there were something incongruous in the bare idea.

"I doubt if Crapson would go, Dad, even if you did turn him out," asserted she. "You would just find him sitting on the steps."

"I believe you're right, Peggy. Well, thank the Lord, there is no danger of his going. I would no more part with Crapson than I would cut off my right hand and probably Gordon feels the same about Catherine, Roberts and the rest. They wait on him by inches and while their devotion is a fine thing they are fast transforming *him* into a dried-up, fussy old bachelor. Of course, he

is ideally comfortable; but he is too comfortable, damn him! He ought to have a wife and six children instead of living in a house where everybody has nervous prostration if the paper-cutter is a sixteenth of an inch out of place."

Margaret moved thoughtfully to the fire and stood looking down into its glowing embers.

"Perhaps he does not wish to marry," ventured she with elaborate carelessness.

"Oh, I don't think he has ever considered marriage seriously," was her father's reply. "He has done a good deal of flitting about and it tends to unsettle a man and make him critical. He gets so he either does not know what he wants or is afraid of the whole thing. Gordon ought to have married years ago, before he was in danger of being spoiled, and I presume he would have if he had not been so wrapped up in his mother. I've always imagined that, lovely as she was, Mrs. Hamilton demanded a good deal of him during the last years of her life and that he was so devoted he gave all she asked and more. Invalids get selfish and self-centered, you know, without realizing it. She took so much of his attention that it has left an enormous gap in his life. What wonder he has turned to business as a solace?"

Wilmot eyed the blaze moodily.

"Not but what business is all well enough in its way. It is a great game, especially in these days of competition. Nevertheless, it is a mighty poor substitute for human companionship. It isn't worth the candle unless you are doing it for somebody else. In Gordon's case there is of course a big incentive to make a success of his job, for not only is most of the Hamilton money tied up with the concern, but when Beck dies he will probably succeed to the full management of affairs. So it is natural he should be interested in making a record for him-

self. Besides, it is not as easy now to roll up a big income to swing a business as it used to be."

"Yet, business or no business, you buy dozens of Ophelia and Butterfly roses," put in Margaret mischievously.

"Well, if a man has a daughter at home who likes roses, what can he do?"

A ripple of laughter followed him as he started up the stairs.

"Don't be late, will you, Dad?" she called. "You know it is your besetting sin to be behindhand. I ought to have made you go and dress long ago."

"Don't fret, kitten, I'll be on time. Crapson will see to that," came reassuringly from the hall above.

Left alone, the girl continued to stand on the hearth looking absently at the flickering logs whose dancing light like an afterglow at dusk sent a shimmer of rose across the folds of her snowy gown. She was thinking of Gordon Hamilton.

Ever since she could remember this man had been a part of her existence, coming and going in her home with the freedom and intimacy of actual kinship. He had been her mother's friend; her father's roommate at Harvard; and one of the godfathers who had assisted at her own christening. It was to him the Wilmots had turned during the tragedy of her mother's illness and death; and afterward it was he who suggested that the three of them go abroad, and who had shouldered the care of arranging the trip and attending to its details. At the time she had not appreciated his devotion in thrusting aside his own concerns so completely and putting his friends' interests before them. But she had appreciated it since then deeply and fully.

What a delightful traveling companion he had been! *How unselfish, how amusing, how patient!* And when

the change of environment began to strengthen and cheer her father, with what exultant eyes did Gordon regard him!

Since that day Hamilton had ever been to her, hero, brother, friend and comrade,— one of the most precious things in her life. With never-ending versatility he had kept pace with her evolution from childhood to womanhood and had followed the juvenile diversions of school vacations with the maturer pleasures of dances, dinners and operas. He knew well how to make a fine art of recreation, for during his earlier manhood Gordon Hamilton had been a great beau, the leader of innumerable cotillions and a much-sought-after dinner guest. Eager mothers had besieged him with invitations to house parties, week-end fêtes and theatricals, and although Hamilton had fluttered here and there and made himself both indispensable and delightful, he had returned from the social fray wholehearted and unattached.

With the death of his frail and beautiful mother the overwhelming grief of his life had come and the world had suddenly turned to tinsel and its gayety to mockery. What more natural than that under the saddening influence of sorrow he and the Wilmots should instinctively have drawn closer together and he should have been at their house more than ever before? And it was since this time that Margaret had noticed a change in his attitude toward her. He was not less friendly but he was more shy and reserved.

At first she feared she had hurt him by some inadvertent word or act and with contrition had slipped a hand into his and asked an explanation. To her surprise, however, the affectionate advance had been instantly rebuffed. Hamilton had turned sharply away as if annoyed by her solicitude and from that day her girlish caresses had been curbed and supplanted by a more

mature and less demonstrative bearing. Nevertheless, despite his unfailing cordiality and kindness, the wall of reserve remained until at length, in despair of ever overthrowing it, she had come to accept it. There seemed less difference in their ages now. Frequently when her father was engaged, Hamilton would take her to the Symphony or to a picture show; and sometimes they would drop into a tea-room afterward or enjoy a Bohemian dinner together. These occasions were fêtes to be marked with a white stone, for Hamilton could be a fascinating companion when he chose and at such times he flung aside his reserve and as in the days when they were together on the continent he exerted his wit, charm and tenderness until he made himself irresistible.

Ah, those happy, happy times would never, alas, come again!

After a little interval her engagement to Archie Lambeth had been announced; the war had followed and then the Wilmots had gone to France, during which time Hamilton had remained at home, sold Liberty Bonds, served on various government commissions and labored at Red Cross drives. Perhaps no American had toiled more modestly, patriotically, or tirelessly and received less recognition for the unstinted pouring out of his strength and fortune. Hamilton wanted no thanks and he received none. Scarcely any one knew from whom the anonymous gifts to the many philanthropic causes arising out of the world reconstruction came. He preferred that this should be so. With victory and a return to normal conditions the many war activities with which he had been connected ceased and as silently as he had come he withdrew from posts that needed his services no longer and turned his energy to the building up of his business.

It was full time he did so, for myriad annoyances were making wretched the lives of every publisher. Paper was high and scarce; printers and binders, like other workmen, demoralized by frequent strikes; competition was acute; geniuses few. The making and selling of books was not what it had been in the past. It was not that Hamilton experienced anxiety lest he himself come to want, for his income was ample and as well invested as an income could be in times that shifted rapidly as a kaleidoscope. He did not care a curse for the money as such. What did rouse him to combat was the danger that he might be beaten at the game he was playing. He was a proud man and a fighter; and one unaccustomed to defeat. To be thwarted by conditions created by a lack of intelligence in others galled him. Moreover, his faith in the nobility of his career was so supreme that he could not feel it merited failure. A good book was the finest type of merchandise existent, and by placing it in the hands of the public was he not performing an act which not alone increased his financial prosperity but uplifted a people? He believed this with all his soul and his heart was in the gospel he disseminated. Other houses might, for gain, stoop to circulating the questionable and the lurid but he would not soil his hands nor sully the reputation of the time-honored firm of which he was a member by so doing.

Both Gordon Hamilton and Lyman Beck might without doubt have been richer had they been less idealistic and pursued a different policy; but at least each of them could meet the eyes of his fellows without blushing and they were of a type to find in this fact ample compensation for whatever loss they might sustain in consequence of their common credo.

It was fortunate that the two were in such complete accord, for each possessed a very definite and clear-cut

personality to which any compromise of principle would have been well-nigh impossible. Although much older than Hamilton, Beck was shrewd enough to recognize that when it came to books Hamilton was mentally the cleverer man. He seemed to have been born with a sixth sense for literary values and to have an almost occult power for scenting quality in any manuscript presented. In consequence, he was able to speak with an authority that commanded instant attention and if he had coaxed many a seedling's talent into bloom he was on the other hand a pitiless judge who showed no quarter to the dilettante.

Had they been willing to confess to the truth, there were scores of literary neophytes in the country who had had wisdom enough to listen to Hamilton and bless him for discouraging at its birth a product that would only have resulted in hours of profitless toil. For this kindly and well-intentioned but thankless service both the world and many an aspirant to fame stood his debtor. More often, however, insulted young authors had gone wrathfully from his doors only to expend time, ink and paper on what usually proved an ultimate failure. Hamilton cherished no resentment when they poured out their wrath upon him but with a tolerant sigh and a shrug of his shoulders watched their departure with pity, deploring their blindness.

And when out of the scum and silt of poor workmanship and inexperience gold flashed with its myriad potentialities for beauty, no one was more appreciative of its native worth than he. He could be gentle, sympathetic, patient beyond belief with the possessor of a genuine idea and aid in its fostering with an expert hand. Once in an æon, like a meteorite dropping from the clouds, a real planet came into his ken, brightening his horizon as nothing else could. Then indeed was he like

a watcher of the skies who rejoiced in a new star with a discoverer's enthusiasm.

Many of these characteristics of his nature Margaret Wilmot knew and many more she guessed. Nevertheless, there were inner chambers that were barred to her and which no key had ever yet unlocked either to man or woman. There was steadfastness there, passion, a chivalry that bordered on the fanatical; a grave, inarticulate religious belief that had come down a heritage from a vanished generation; and dreams that were all his own. None of these treasures did he scatter before the herd. Looking at the man society saw only the shallows of his personality with their scintillations of wit and charm; but there were swifter, deeper currents in Hamilton that moved not on the surface and stirred only to mighty emotions. Perhaps not even he himself guessed their existence, or the distances to which they were capable of carrying him if once they should be unleashed. Hitherto they had been docile enough, slaves of an invincible will. The man who greeted him at the club, the woman who beckoned him to her tea-table suspected them not; nor in truth did Margaret Wilmot, who thought she had fathomed almost every recess of his heart.

But Roberts and faithful old Catherine knew their master better and sensed that wealth and success with all their glamor are poor substitutes for human affection, and that in spite of all his popularity and his many friends, Gordon Hamilton was a lonely, groping, unsatisfied man.

CHAPTER XV

A DISCOVERY

ON the day that he was to dine with the Wilmots Gordon Hamilton sat alone in his office, drumming impatiently with his finger tips on the edge of his desk. He had looked over his mail and answered such letters as demanded immediate attention; had discussed with the editorial department and turned down a manuscript submitted by Rachel Dawn which although fairly good was not, in his opinion, good enough; had consulted with Mr. Beck as to granting a raise of wages at the bindery; had examined the reports sent in by the salesmen on the road; and now at eleven o'clock he was awaiting with no small degree of curiosity and anticipation the coming of Miss Penelope Turner.

Already the hour hand was traveling past the time specified, and still the lady had not made her appearance. He detested persons who were late, especially suppliant authors. Under ordinary conditions he would have put on his hat and gone out simply for the sake of delivering a rebuke to the delinquent. But Miss Penelope Turner must be indulged. Genius was erratic and, he confessed, had a certain right to be independent of the codes that governed the rabble. It would be audacious to hold the heaven-born to earthly laws. Nevertheless he did hope that the dreamy and mystic-minded lady — for doubtless she was dreamy and mystical — had not forgotten the appointment.

It was a bit unusual for an author not to heed the gracious beckonings of a publisher. Ordinarily writers were only too keen for such interviews. Perhaps, he reflected with annoyance, the note Miss Stevens had sent had carried so blatant an echo of eagerness that Penelope Turner, appraising herself at her full value, and realizing she would have no difficulty in disposing of her wares elsewhere, felt she could afford to be supercilious. If only he had at his command some information to guide him in his dealings with her! But of both her personality and her past he was ignorant. Not in a long time had any human being piqued his curiosity and interest to such a degree. Of course, there was the possibility that the soul in the book she had written was her soul, and if it was then he knew her eye to eye and heart to heart — knew far more of her real self than if he had possessed reams of superficial data concerning her. But on the other hand far from being the prototype of her heroine and the embodiment of her own philosophy, this will-o'-the-wisp author might be quite a different person. He had learned during years of grim experience that it was easy to create dream characters from paper and ink and he no longer expected authors in the flesh to be the original and captivating creatures they were between pasteboard covers. Doubtless like many another, this Penelope Turner, who allured, tantalized and enthralled in print, was just an everyday girl without one quality out of the ordinary to redeem her. And yet, try as he would to make himself believe it, he could not really think so. There was too much in her novel that went beneath the skin and which could only have been gained from living. Her men and women were not alone the beings of her fancy; they had minds that reasoned, hearts that throbbed, souls that suffered and triumphed. Such red blood was not to be squeezed from the dead agencies

of paper and pencil. The girl (he wondered why he invariably pictured her as a girl) must in truth have experienced, at least to some extent, the thing she painted.

As the clock ticked out the minutes he found himself almost dreading to behold Galatea descended from her pedestal. If through the medium of a typewriter she were able to cast such a spell over him, what weapons had he with which to meet her piquant dialogue, the fascination of her humor, the whole feminine charm of her? Oh, she was — she must be old in the arts, Miss Penelope Turner — either old or very naïve, fearless and young. He was at a loss to decide which.

Nervously he lighted a cigarette and puffed little rings of pale blue into the air. Then suddenly fearing the fastidious Miss Turner might object to smoke he boyishly tossed the freshly burning stub aside and rising, opened the window. How absurd, thought he with a shrug, as he sat down again, for him to be so much concerned with the likes and dislikes of this unknown aspirant to fame. Why, one would almost think it was he and not she whose fate hung in the editorial balance!

Still she did not come. Although a clock confronted him, for the twentieth time he automatically took out his watch and this time before he returned it to his pocket he had the wit to pause and examine it long enough to wonder if it could be right, compare it with the timepiece above his desk and absently wind it up. This feat was, however, performed with so much preoccupation that he kept on with it until a rebellious snap of the mainspring brought him suddenly to himself.

A muttered "Damn!" escaped him and replacing the now silenced article in his waistcoat he renewed his grim vigil.

He would give the enchantress five minutes more be-

fore he shut her out of paradise; then, whether or no, he would go out — hang her! Should she care to remain and await his return she might be the one to pace the floor and fidget. Yet would she? There were qualities in that manuscript of hers that made him uneasy on this point. Would she not be far more likely to toss her pretty head (it must be pretty) and sweep out of his domain never to reënter it again? Certainly he could not afford to have that happen.

It was now half-past eleven. Evidently Penelope Turner was not coming.

He drew a blank sheet of paper toward him and began to scrawl on it crude little figures of men and animals. Then he rang the bell. ,

“That Miss Turner to whom you sent the note yesterday, Miss Stevens, has not put in her appearance. You are sure the letter was mailed.”

“Yes, sir.”

“That’s all. I’ll wait a few moments longer and then I’ll have to leave for lunch. I have an appointment at the Club.”

The door closed and again Hamilton was alone. From the pile of letters on his desk he singled out one that had come from the bindery and with one eye on the clock read it half-heartedly. Then, because he could not focus his attention on it, he jammed it back into its envelope and irritably tossed it once more with the others. He’d better go to lunch. After that perhaps he would feel more like settling down to work. With this determination he rose, but before he had secured hat or overcoat the office telephone tinkled and faintly above the siren horn of a passing fire-engine he heard the operator’s voice.

“There is a lady here, Mr. Hamilton. Will you see her?”

"What name?"

"Miss ——" the reply was lost in the hubbub outside but he caught a single syllable.

"Who?" Again the rumble of traffic blotted out the sound.

"Oh, no matter," returned Hamilton peevishly. "Send her up."

He put his hand to his tie and straightened it. He was not vain but to-day he was nervous.

A moment later the door opened admitting a rather diminutive and decidedly shabby young person who, after advancing a few feet into the room, lingered with timidity on the rug as if uncertain whether to stand there or approach nearer. So shy was she that she scarcely lifted her head and Hamilton was actually sorry for her. Of course, decided he, leaping at a swift conclusion, this short name he had heard from the operator was Dawn and this was the Miss Rachel Dawn whose rejected manuscript, lovingly tied with blue ribbon, lay at that very moment on his desk. Poor child! Judging from her faded serge and her much-worn hat she needed money badly and would be grievously disappointed when she heard his decision on her story. To tell her seemed like dealing a blow to the defenseless. He had always contended that the business world was no place for a woman, anyway. He wished to goodness he could either publish the book or that she had not come. It was so much easier to dictate a polite refusal and tumble it into the mail than it was to speak the same cruel words point-blank to as expectant and helpless a creature as this. Then his eye was caught by the printer's letter lying on his desk and recollecting what the increased rates demanded were going to mean, he realized he could not afford to give way to sentiment.

Rachel must be treated kindly but firmly, encouraged,

and sent away with her blue-ribboned product. It was a disagreeable but inevitable duty.

He cleared his throat.

"About that manuscript of yours," began he, fingering his watch guard and not looking up.

"Yes?" The tension in the monosyllable was disconcerting.

"It was very good of you to submit it to us and we are extremely sorry to be obliged to return it."

The woman before him did not speak.

"Not but what your story has much merit," went on Hamilton quickly. "Indeed it contains a great deal that is excellent. But it is not quite what we want. It lacks both the elements of suspense and strength — two important essentials to the successful book. Were we to publish it as it now stands I am sure that sometime in the future, when you had acquired greater skill and power, you would regret it. I am afraid this decision is disappointing but —" he glanced with a kind smile toward the eyes which he felt conscious were fixed upon him. At the sight of them, however, he started, a haunting memory awakened by their clear gaze.

"Why — eh —" he stammered, breaking off awkwardly.

"You do not remember me."

"I fear I must own to my stupidity."

"I am the girl you found crying on the sand at Belleport."

"Upon my word, so you are!"

"I did write a book even though you cautioned me not to, you see," the girl continued with a wan, half-defiant little smile. "Evidently, however, I'd much better not have done so since you are sending it back."

Hamilton's mind traveled with speed.

So Rachel Dawn was from Belleport! And probably,

poor child, she had spent all her savings coming to the city in search of fame. He scowled at the thought. It was a pity such persons would not heed the advice of those who knew, instead of throwing away time and money in a chase for the end of the rainbow. Judging from the literary attempt she now offered, a long, weary path lay between her and that coveted pot of gold. If she were willing to travel it, well and good; it was probable that in time she would reach her goal. But if she expected success at once he must assure her that such a dream was impossible of fulfillment. In order to soften the blow he felt he must ultimately deliver, he dallied.

"Have you been long in Boston?"

"I have been here since March," was the low answer. "I hoped to stay on and do some more writing. That all depends, though, on the fate of this book."

"So you never married that chap who was in love with you?" ventured Hamilton reminiscently.

"Dick Morton? Oh, no. I told you then I never should."

A faint smile played about her lips. She was really rather attractive when she smiled—very attractive. And what was there in her eyes that made one wish to look into them again and again? Given some descent clothes and shoes—he glanced down and noticed what a pretty little foot she had.

"But women have been known to change their minds."

"I never do," was the spirited answer.

"You are really determined to rule this unfortunate young man out of the running and take up a literary career?"

"Yes," came firmly from the girl.

"But, my dear young lady, do you realize that literary careers are not easy fields in which to secure success and

win a livelihood? Out of the scores of books written and submitted for publication only a very small percentage ever see the light. In these days the expense of getting out a book is so great that firms cannot afford to gamble with possible failures. A story must not only be worth reading but it must pay its way."

"And you do not think mine will?"

"I am afraid not."

The reply was uttered with genuine regret and instantly Hamilton saw the expectant eyes cloud and the lashes droop over them like a curtain.

"Not but what you have done uncommonly well for a first try," he hastened to add. "If you were willing to put in a good lot of hard work and stick at it, there is a chance that you might win out in time. Our house, however, maintains a rather conservative and exacting standard and this you fail as yet to reach."

"I understand."

She rose and moved with dignity toward the door.

"You have been very kind," she said.

Knowing what the verdict must have meant, Hamilton could not repress his admiration at the manner in which she accepted it. What a bully little loser she was!

"Shall I forward the manuscript to you or would you prefer to take it with you?"

"I'd rather take it now, thank you."

"I believe it happens to be right here on my desk. I will have it wrapped up for you."

With one hand on the blue-ribboned sheaf of paper he reached toward the bell.

"But that isn't my story, Mr. Hamilton."

"I beg your pardon!" responded the man blankly.

"I say that that manuscript all rolled up and tied with ribbon is not mine."

The publisher paused, nonplused.

"Aren't you Miss Dawn — Miss Rachel Dawn?" inquired he sharply.

"No."

"Then who in —" he stopped in helpless wonder.

"In the deuce am I?" completed the girl, with a mischievous laugh.

"Exactly!"

"Why, I'm Penelope Turner."

"My word!" gasped Gordon Hamilton weakly.

"I understood you wanted to see me," ventured the girl.

CHAPTER XVI

THE VICTOR

PROBABLY the ever debonair Mr. Hamilton of Beck and Hamilton had never been more disconcerted in all his life or less successful in concealing it.

"I certainly do want to see you, Miss Turner," he contrived to stammer, his bearing instantly transformed from pity to a discomfited graciousness. "Won't you please be seated?"

"But I know I am detaining you." Penelope motioned toward the hat and gloves lying suggestively on his desk.

"Not in the least," Hamilton protested.

"You were going out, however, weren't you? I know I am late. You see, I have not yet learned my way about the city, and the business section still confuses me."

"It confuses many another beside you," was the retort. "I wish we might borrow not only some of your Cape Cod peace and quiet but some of its simplicity as well."

"You like the Cape?" She brightened.

"I used to spend all my summers near Hyannis when I was a boy. We owned a house there. Since it has been sold I am compelled to patronize the hotels; it is the best I can do. I had stolen off for a week-end of fishing at the time —"

"You caught me crying on the beach," put in the girl. "I must have presented a very ridiculous spectacle that day. But you see I had been getting ready for that cry for weeks."

"Under the circumstances you must have cursed me for interrupting it," said Hamilton quizzically.

"I think I did — mildly," admitted Penelope, flashing him a smile. "I do not often cry and it was not only annoying but mortifying to be caught at it. However, since I was so uncontestably submerged in tears there was no use in pretending I wasn't weeping."

"I hope that one torrent cleared your sky and that you have had no cause to grieve since."

"I haven't really cried, but I have worried a good deal," was the naïve confession. "Whether I cry again or not depends on you."

"On me?"

"Yes."

"Oh, you mean that the fate of your story will decide it."

"Certainly. Naturally I am very anxious to hear what you are going to say about it. Are you going to turn it down?" She moved to the edge of her chair, the fingers of her worn gloves tightly interlaced.

"No, Miss Turner," Hamilton answered, instantly grave. "On the contrary, we shall be only too pleased and proud to publish it."

He expected a response of pleasure or satisfaction, but she made none and shooting a glance at her he saw the tenseness of her figure relax and her lips quiver. It was not until that moment that he sensed how worn and thin she looked. The flush that had colored her face, when she entered, had entirely vanished, leaving her pallid to the lips. Still watching her, Hamilton shifted his position nervously. The movement seemed to rouse her and with obvious effort she forced herself to speak:

"I — am — very — glad."

The words were so low that they were breathed rather than uttered. He noticed that she was trembling.

Nevertheless she fought determinedly for self-control and presently added in a firmer, although still weak tone, as if struggling to make the fact a reality:

"So you like my book — actually like it!"

"I do exceedingly," announced the publisher. "It is an exceptionally fine piece of work and I congratulate you."

"It wasn't a piece of work," the girl objected. "It was something I had to say just as I had to cry. I couldn't help it."

"I wish we had more such spontaneous literature."

"It comes at a high price," sighed she more to herself than to him. "I have been very unhappy."

"And out of your unhappiness has grown this beauty," the man said gently. "You may well be proud to have converted your clouds into a thing as exquisite."

"I am not proud," came softly from Penelope, "but I am more glad than I can say. I think my grandfather will be pleased."

"I am sure he will be."

"It has meant a lot for him to let me come up here from Belleport. Had I dreamed how expensive it was going to be, I should never have dared to suggest such a plan. Once here, however, I felt I must stay until I had made good."

"You certainly have done it."

Evidently she did not trust herself to speak, for instead of answering she resolutely fought back the tears that trembled on her lashes.

"You — you really think some copies of the story will sell?" she at last inquired timidly.

"I don't think so — I know it."

She scrutinized him unbelievably.

"You are not joking?"

"Joking! Not at all."

"Or — or — just saying it to be kind?"

"No, indeed!" was the vehement protest.

Again she studied his face.

"When do you suppose —" she began, then paused.

"How long will it take to print the book and sell it?"

"Oh, we shall bring it out right away. Probably within six or eight months."

The words brought a cry of dismay.

"But that is almost a year. Couldn't you do it sooner?"

"Sooner? Why, my dear Miss Turner, six months is a very short time in which to get a book upon the market. You do not realize what it means to edit, print and bind it, let alone advertising and traveling it. Nobody has yet heard of you, you know. Therefore we must pave your way by a blare of trumpets, and to sound these from the Atlantic seaboard to the Pacific, to say nothing of Australia and Canada, will require carefully organized publicity."

"And no books can be sold until then?"

"I am afraid not," responded Hamilton in a soothing voice.

Many times before it had fallen to his lot to confront impatient young authors eager to see their first work in print, and comfort them. This one, however, to his surprise exhibited none of the symptoms characteristic of the novice in the world of business. She neither fretted nor fumed but was strangely still, and fearing that she was too deeply vexed and disappointed to reply he rose and stood before her, looking into her downcast face. It was then he observed with a shock that she was really ill. Still she made an heroic effort to retain her hold upon herself.

"I had hoped —" began she, moving her hand grop-

ingly toward the arm of the chair. The words trailed off into silence. She had fainted.

Hamilton was a man of the world and not an impulsive person, and therefore it was strange, he reflected afterward, that in the emergency that surprised him he did not follow the conventional course,—call Miss Stevens, summon a cab and send the girl home. Ordinarily that was what he would have done. But in this particular instance it never occurred to him to do any of these things. He was too keenly interested in the pitiful little figure huddled in the great chair.

His mother's invalidism had brought him into such daily contact with sickness that he experienced in its presence none of the helplessness and fear peculiar to most masculinity. Nevertheless it was not alone because he knew what to do that he assumed full responsibility in the present crisis. Other women had fainted and he had not felt called upon to do more than offer a perfunctory sympathy and shunt them off on the first of their kind who was within call. But with Penelope Turner it was different. With swift strokes of imagination he drew in the grim human tragedy. Too self-respecting to ask aid and unwilling to write home for more money, she had apparently gone without food until she was at the brink of starvation. At least, that was the story as he divined it, and as he worked to restore consciousness to the inert being before him there was ample evidence to bear out his hasty diagnosis. All Hamilton's righteous wrath rose and his quixotic chivalry awakened as with reverent touch he chaffed the cold, almost transparent hands.

Alone in the city and starving! With shame he thought bitterly of the money he had tossed away on a hundred useless and needless things—the money a reckless generation was squandering on foolish pleasures. A

millionth part of it would have kept this girl in health. It was terrible enough for men to starve but a woman — ! Well, no prying eyes should behold her in her misfortune and morbidly gloat over her pathetic history. He would see to that. And when her book was published, there should be no breath of patronizing gossip about its author. To every individual connected with Beck and Hamilton, to the world at large, Penelope Turner should stand forth a princess, a triumphant genius, supreme in the glory to which her pen entitled her.

Poor child! Brave little fighter!

She had struggled for her crown and she should wear it with queenly honors.

Swiftly Gordon Hamilton mapped out his course. He would call a taxi and take the girl to his own house where once sheltered from the eyes of the public and in the custody of old Catherine she should be given the rest and nourishment she needed. Otherwise how could he be certain she would receive proper care? Only the exceptional landlady would take the trouble to nurse a penniless lodger back to life. Such service was not within the bond. Instead, the unlucky girl would probably be rushed off to a hospital, and the woman who accepted the modest fee for her room would thank her stars that she was rid of this unexpected burden. As Hamilton pictured a hospital ward where the penniless of a great city are herded together, everything in him rebelled at placing Penelope Turner in such a place. She who had battled so valiantly to keep her poverty a secret! Who had known the niceties of life! It was impossible! No, the only consistent thing was to take her home; shield her from discovery and restore her to health.

That such a plan was drastic and unconventional he *did not pause* to consider, or if objections to it arose

in his mind he quickly brushed them aside, offering as argument the urgency of the case. Whatever was humane was right; and what was right he would not hesitate to perform. Nevertheless, as he sped down Beacon Street in the taxi which he had at once ordered with his only semi-conscious companion beside him, he did sense that Catherine might be somewhat astounded at the proceeding and raise a protest against such unheard-of philanthropy. Although born in Scotland she had imbibed enough Boston conservatism not to enjoy novel innovations, especially unless she were consulted concerning them beforehand. She did not like to have the clockwork of the home disturbed. In this instance, granted Gordon, she certainly would have some claim to be both amazed and flurried. It was unfortunate the entire Hamilton household had held to such methodical living that they had worn ruts so deep as to have well-nigh eliminated the quality of adaptability from their natures. It made it harder for him to explain his sudden altruism and for them to understand it.

In fact, now that the moment for confronting the old family retainers approached, he was surprised to find himself overwhelmed by a relic of the same apprehension he had experienced when, as a boy, he had scratched the floor with his roller skates or robbed the cookie jar. Tradition is strong and neither Catherine nor Roberts had ever been indulgent to wrong doers. Yet as he looked down at the girl whose head drooped against his arm and noted the purple shadows that circled her closed eyes, he was ashamed that he should not have more moral courage than to allow his servants to intimidate him. After all, whose house was it? And what was a home for if one could not play the good Samaritan in it now and then?

As the car jolted over a crossing he raised Penelope's

head a little higher against his shoulder. How blind he had been not to have recognized from the first moment how frail she was! Why, in his ignorance and stupidity he might have dealt her her death blow. But she had been so deceivingly gay! How splendid of her to be game when facing defeat and collapse only when success was won. Many a victor in a hard-earned race had dropped as he crossed the tape. So it had been with Penelope. Studying her, his gaze traveled from her disordered hair to her long lashes and the ivory whiteness of her skin.

Apparently she was oblivious as to where she was being carried, if indeed she sensed at all any of the happenings of the present.

In the confusion of the noon hour he and the chauffeur had been able to conduct her to the car without observation. Up to the present all had been very simple. But to appear with her before Catherine, Roberts and the rest was no such easy matter. At the office he reigned supreme; at home he was merely the lowest subject of a domestic autocracy.

As the streets flew past and he neared the familiar dwellings of his neighbors he gasped involuntarily at the daring of his action. How had he ever had the audacity to conceive, much less perpetrate such a mad scheme? Well, it was done now — or as good as done — and he must face it out without betraying how apologetic he actually felt. To confess to fear was to weaken his power.

The driver had evidently misunderstood the number of the house and was passing it when Hamilton tapped sharply on the glass, bringing the car to a sudden stop before the curb.

Penelope opened her eyes and looked at him vaguely.

"We are getting out here," he said very gently, men-

tally cursing the stupidity of the chauffeur. "Let me help you."

She made no objection. In fact, she did not seem to comprehend the words, although she responded to his command with a certain passive obedience.

"Run ahead there and ring the bell," called he impatiently to the gaping taxi driver. "Tell my butler I want him."

It was the first plunge.

Roberts, trembling with amazement, hurried out to the sidewalk. His master never came home at this hour of the day and seldom in a taxi. Some unprecedented calamity must, of course, have befallen him. When, however, he beheld Mr. Hamilton descending from the motor car and supporting a young woman whose face was entirely unfamiliar to him, his wonder knew no bounds. He prided himself on his knowledge of the social register and his familiarity with the faces of Boston's élite. But this shabbily attired female was not of the city's chosen; that went without saying. 'Nevertheless there was in him too much of the thoroughbred to betray surprise, and when told to assist in getting the lady into the house he obeyed with his customary alacrity, every muscle of his countenance as immovable as that of a bronze Buddha.

But Catherine, who had been a member of the Hamilton household longer than even Gordon himself, unfortunately possessed a more demonstrative and less easily controlled temperament, and claiming her right of seniority she made her astonishment quite evident when she saw the stranger huddled on the hall settle.

"Mercy on us, Mr. Gordon, whatever is the matter?" ejaculated she breathlessly. "An accident?"

Hamilton summoned all his fortitude.

"No, there's been no accident, Catherine; Miss Turner is just ill and I have brought her home." He tried to

speaking as if the occurrence was no more than an everyday happening.

Catherine fixed her small beady eyes upon him, inquiry shining from their depths.

"I want you to help me, Catherine," he went on casting his dignity to the winds. "Will you?"

Ah, he had struck the right note; in an instant her expression shifted from antagonism to friendliness. Without appearing to notice the transformation he continued:

"I know what an excellent nurse you are and I am relying on you to use your skill. We men are helpless creatures," concluded he with a deprecatory gesture.

"You certainly are," was the condescending and complacent reply. "But you can't expect me to work in the dark. What is the matter with the young lady?"

"I hardly know," answered Hamilton guardedly. "We shall have to call the doctor and find out."

"You haven't any idea?" the housekeeper gasped incredulously.

"She seems tired and to need a little building up." The sharp black eyes of the old servitor were upon him and the jaunty off-handedness of the reply failed ignominiously. Well aware that the elaborate carelessness concealed the truth which she demanded, the woman waited.

"Perhaps we'd better not delay now for talk," Hamilton said. "If you can get a room ready—"

"The rooms are always ready," Catherine returned stiffly. "Which one do you wish used?"

Again Hamilton blushed and looked straight before him, determination in his every feature.

"The front one is the pleasantest, isn't it? It gets more sun."

"Your *mother's room*?"

"Why not?"

"It never has been used since—"

"I know," interrupted the man, cutting short the sentence. "But I have been intending for some time past to use it. This will be a good occasion on which to begin."

"You want me to leave all the things there?"

"Certainly. That is, everything that makes it comfortable and pleasant. If you will just dust and air it —"

"It is always dusted and aired; there is no room in this house that isn't!" sniffed Catherine. "If you mean to have it used it is ready."

"Fine! Then Roberts and I will help Miss Turner up there."

"I can help you," was the jealous protest. "Roberts much better be telephoning the doctor. He is no use upstairs. Men are only in the way when it comes to sickness."

"I am afraid that is so," agreed Gordon meekly. Since he had made the same statement himself only a few seconds before, he felt he could not in conscience refute it. "Perhaps if he could fetch a glass of cognac —"

"He's gone for it," was the majestic retort.

She rose. It was evident that before the incident was closed she had something more to say.

"As I've told you many times, I think it's always better, when you are expecting to bring guests home, to let me know ahead. You might at least telephone. It is very upsettin' to have unexpected company — especially a woman."

"I realize that," was the humble reply. "But in this case I could not let you know. I didn't know it myself."

As she regarded him a score of questions spoke in her eyes and trembled on her tongue. Nevertheless she did

not utter them but turned away with an unsatisfied sigh. At least she had said her say.

"We shall have to do the best we can," he heard her murmur, "and put up with makeshifts."

The makeshifts, so termed, in spite of the dispirited designation, could not really be considered to carry with them any great degree of martyrdom, for had Penelope's arrival been expected few details could have been added to welcome her. Even flowers on the dressing-table were not lacking.

"Give her a little broth or milk at intervals; let her sleep; and don't talk to her," commanded Doctor Towner. "It is possible she may sleep way into to-morrow. Should she do so, there will be no cause for alarm. She is tired out and needs rest. Whenever she rouses, however, feed her sparingly. I'll look in in the morning."

"There is nothing more that we can do?" queried Hamilton, anxiously confronting the physician as he descended the stairs.

"Nothing. She will come out of this all right, although it may require some little time," was the reassuring answer of the physician as he slipped into his coat. "To diagnose the case frankly I should say the girl had been starved." There was veiled curiosity in his scrutiny.

"I — I — am afraid so," faltered Hamilton.

"I suppose such cases are not unusual in large cities," observed Doctor Towner, "but we seldom get them until it is too late. You say this Miss Turner is a —"

"An acquaintance — friend, yes," stammered Gordon. "I had no idea, however, that she was overworking."

"And starving herself at the same time," put in the doctor curtly.

"No; of course not."

Doctor Towner, who had not only ushered Gordon into the world but followed both his parents to the confines of eternity, had for half a century been the confidant of the family and like Catherine was familiar with every tradition of the Hamilton household. Therefore he realized as well as did every one else that the present happening was phenomenal and to be kept in the dark concerning it did not please him. Had he not a legitimate right to know this mysterious stranger's history? He certainly thought so. Nevertheless, no information appeared to be forthcoming, and with a shrug he drew on his gloves.

"I'll be in in the morning," repeated he, taking up his bag.

"I wish you could get in before I start for the office," Gordon replied. "I should like to be reassured about the case before I leave home."

"How will eight-thirty do?"

"That will suit me to a turn."

"All right, I'll do that."

The door banged as the doctor let himself out.

But as he stepped into the street and beckoned to his chauffeur Doctor Towner was thoughtful.

"Gordon seems damned anxious about that girl," he mused to himself. "I wonder where he picked her up. She may be some employee of his who has been under-paid and has collapsed in consequence, and perhaps his conscience troubled him when he found it out. He has some obligation toward her — you may be sure of that. It is no idle philanthropy. And if it were, it isn't like the Hamiltons to meet it in this fashion. They would hand out the money generously enough but they never would break their traditions by taking promiscuous persons into their home. I doubt if Gordon would go that length either. No, sir! There's a story behind all this.

But whatever it is, Gordon Hamilton isn't telling it."

Possibly had Hamilton known the conclusion to which the doctor's imagination had leaped he might have been tempted to break silence and do so.

CHAPTER XVII

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING

IN fact, it was amazing how little Hamilton did contrive to tell during the hours that immediately followed. Late in the afternoon he returned from the office, learned that Miss Turner was still sleeping and went to his room to dress for the Wilmots' dinner. This ceremonial he performed reluctantly. As he fastened his collar he decided he was growing old. Not only was he fagged by a disturbing day but keenly as he delighted in Peggy's society, he much preferred to see her alone rather than in company with friends so much his juniors. Of late he had begun to find the chatter of the young exceedingly boresome; moreover when these returned war-workers got together, the man who had remained at home held only a superficial place in the conversation. In addition to these objections there was to-night a marked unwillingness to leave home. The urge to stretch himself in his leather chair with the paper and a good book and be on hand in case Penelope Turner roused and asked for him was so strong as to be almost irresistible.

Yet his tyrannical New Englandism seldom allowed him to break a promise, and to cancel a dinner engagement at the last moment was according to his immutable social and ethical codes an enormity for which only sudden death furnished justifiable excuse. Then there was Peggy to consider. He would sacrifice much rather than disappoint her. So with lagging hand he tied his

tie, slipped into his coat and descended the stairs to the beat of the motor-car he could hear panting at the curb. He was not, however, to escape so easily, for as Roberts approached to hand him his hat, Catherine tiptoed into the hall. In her eyes he could read the same questions he had been conscious were there ever since the moment he had brought Penelope into the house, but now curiosity was blended with reproach. Nevertheless, he ignored the dumb interrogation resolutely.

"Is she still asleep?" he whispered.

Catherine nodded.

"That's good. Remember you can call Doctor Towner should you need him; and in case of actual emergency you can telephone me at the Wilmots, you know."

"Yes."

Although there seemed to be nothing further to say, she loitered while Hamilton drew on his gloves. But except to nod a good night he gave her no second glance.

"You need not wait up for me, Roberts," said he, taking his hat from the old servant. "I have my latchkey and I shall not want anything."

A rush of air swept in through the great door and he was in the street. As he shot along the crowded thoroughfare, flashing with moving lights, he pondered uneasily as to what might occur in his absence. Suppose Miss Turner should rouse and object to the part he had so high-handedly taken in her affairs? She certainly had cause to challenge his interference, well-intentioned as it was. At present everything seemed to indicate that the sleeping powder Doctor Towner had prescribed would insure unbroken rest for many hours, but if it failed to do so there was liable to be an awkward scene, which might be rendered even the more distressing if he were not present to curb its force. Altogether, Gordon was impatient to have the evening over, and it demanded every

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ounce of his will power to face Margaret Wilmot and her father and greet them in his customarily light-hearted fashion.

The guests had assembled when he entered the drawing-room and at a distant table beneath the lamp he could see Nathalie Sears and Nancy Endicott turning over an album of snapshots and chatting gayly with a broad-shouldered stranger possessed of a pleasing voice and delightfully infectious laughter. Gordon knew both the girls, for they were children of younger matrons in his own set. For years he had danced with their mothers only to be handed down at last like some precious heirloom to the débutante daughters by whom he was regarded as a valuable social asset.

Nancy Endicott, small, dark and vivacious, was not only an exceptionally pretty girl but an unusually well-groomed one; nevertheless she had failed to win the popularity of Nathalie Sears who, although not beautiful, had a coaxing little way of saying to every man she met:

"Really? I never knew that before. Do tell me about it! You men always know so much."

This password had been her sesame to favor and while her adorers bumbled into her ear tales of stocks and bonds, of mines and machinery, she listened with wondering blue eyes fixed raptly on their faces and drank in their words of wisdom with an intent air very appealing. It was an old trick and not an especially original one but it never failed her. She was, in fact, resorting to the threadbare device when Gordon approached, for he heard her lip to the tall young man bending over her:

"Sometime you must tell me how you clever people in State Street manage to make so much money. I'd love to know."

"Lots of the rest of us would love to, too," laughed Mr. Wilmot good-humoredly, who had caught the remark

and recognized the countersign. "What do you think State Street is, Nathalie — a sort of mint?"

She dimpled, flushing pink as the coral of her gown.

"Well, you know you all do get horribly rich down there," she pouted. "Isn't it so, Mr. Hamilton?"

"Oh, you mustn't put such a sordid question to Mr. Hamilton, dear," interrupted Nancy Endicott. "A man who spends his days among such highbrow things as books does not concern himself with filthy lucre."

"Hear! Hear! I object," Mr. Wilmot laughed. "We do not rate our business as a sordid one, do we, youngster?"

He touched the elbow of the man examining the pictures.

"Gordon, I want you to meet one of my boys from France," he continued. "He was a captain in my company and I am sure you will be the more eager to know him when I tell you he was the chap responsible for Peggy's rescue at Neuilly."

Instantly Hamilton's hand shot out, catching the other's palm in a firm grasp.

"What can one say in gratitude for a service like that?" queried he with feeling.

The young soldier made a protesting gesture.

"There are some things one is only too proud to have had the opportunity to do," replied he.

Although he spoke quietly his voice was one that carried, and as Hamilton's gaze traveled to Margaret's face he saw her blush.

"You are taking me in to dinner, Gordon," she announced, stepping between the two men and placing a hand on his arm. "I arranged it on purpose because it will give me such a nice opportunity to scold you. You'll be powerless to get away and will just have to sit and listen. Where have you been all this long time?"

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"Infernally busy," was the lame excuse. "Besides, I knew you had a lot to do and would be busy."

"Did you ever find me too busy to see you?"

They moved toward the dining room.

"I had no mind to put you to the test," declared Gordon lightly. "Your sense of duty is too strong. Besides, you have younger friends. I am growing old, Peggy."

"Nonsense!"

"But I am, dear child."

She put her fingers in her ears.

"I won't have you say that," asserted she with spirit as he drew out her chair and seated her. "In the first place it is not true; and in the second, even if it were, I should not believe it."

He cast a furtive glance at her; then looked away.

"Dad thinks you are working too hard," she remarked.

"Oh, it's not that," was the moody reply.

"Then what is it?"

Hamilton pulled himself together.

"There, there, don't you go worrying your head about me, little woman. I'm all right," he asserted with a smile. "Not until this war turmoil settles down and the grumblers find out what they want and get it, or resign themselves to going without it, shall any of us draw a long breath. Just at present everybody seems possessed with the lottery spirit of trying to get big money in return for a small expenditure of capital. The working man is putting in as little as he can and is desirous of receiving manyfold what his labor is worth. Those higher up are doing the same. Nobody is working for the love of doing a fine job for its own sake."

"There certainly is joy in hard work," answered Margaret gravely. "I never understood before I went to France what it meant to be physically tired from a long

day's work. The sensation is a compensation in itself. I used to get so worn out that sometimes when it came night it seemed as if I never would be able to take up the fight again; and yet with the morning the battle looked as alluring and well worth the winning as ever."

"You were not thinking of yourself; that was the secret," Gordon remarked. "Until our laboring men cease to count their hours so assiduously and can toil with their minds on their jobs instead of the clock and their pay envelopes, they are never going to have contented spirits. The moral effect of slipshod work is the most disastrous influence I know. It cheats the laborer of his greatest reward — the satisfaction of a task well done."

"It is a satisfaction, isn't it?" Margaret observed wistfully. "I'd give worlds if I still had something to do."

"But haven't you something very definite to do already, Peggy?" Hamilton questioned. "I should think the running of this establishment alone was sufficient to keep any one woman occupied."

"Oh, this house almost runs itself," smiled the girl. "I believe it would actually get along quite as well, perhaps better, without me."

"Your father wouldn't."

"No, I suppose not."

"Your friends need you, too,"

"Oh, they —"

"And — and — there is Lambeth."

"Of course."

The girl took a rose from the table and centering her attention on it, fastened it with elaborate care in her corsage.

"I hear he was in Serbia," said Hamilton after a pause.

"Yes."

"It must have been a tremendously interesting place to work."

"Yes, it was."

"You saw him before you sailed for home?" the man persisted.

"Yes."

"How proud you must have been that he was able to play such a helpful part in the scrimmage."

"Everybody has played a helpful part," was the quick retort. "Archie was no exception. The men who stayed at home and drudged deserve equal praise. As for the men who fought—" she stopped abruptly, biting her lip. "Come," said she in a different tone. "Let's not talk about the war."

Hamilton saw her glance move restlessly round the table until it reached the face of the officer at her elbow, where it intercepted a smile. She smiled a quick flash in return and looked away with a deepening flush.

"What is the name of your soldier hero?" he asked in an undertone. "I did not catch it when introduced."

"Morton."

"Morton! Not Dick Morton?"

"Yes." She wheeled on him with surprise. "Do you know him?"

"No; oh, no," Hamilton hastened to say. "But I seem to have heard the name before. Where does he come from?"

"Some little town on the Cape," responded she. "Orleans, or Hyannis, or Wilton—I don't just remember."

"Not Belleport?"

"Yes, that's it! Belleport. How did you know?" Again she regarded him sharply.

"It was just a guess," answered Hamilton with a

shrug, turning instinctively to examine over her head the stranger's face.

It was a fine, young, eager face and the elder man studied it critically, intently.

"You seem interested in Mr. Morton," her quiet voice broke in on the silence.

Hamilton started and turned to find her eyes fixed upon him.

"I beg your pardon," apologized he. "Yes, I was interested. Am I not always interested in your friends?"

"You don't know him then," she repeated.

"Not at all. How should I?"

"But you seemed to find the name familiar. And you knew Belleport."

"I have been there summers, you know."

As if half satisfied, he saw the inquiring look fade.

"Oh, so you have. I had forgotten that."

Later on, thinking it over, it came to Hamilton that he had let the easy and natural opportunity for mentioning Penelope slip past. He had not meant to conceal her existence from the Wilmots, his best friends. Of course he need not have divulged her entire history; but he might have spoken of her in guarded fashion. Well, it was too late now. Perhaps some future time he would tell Margaret about her.

Nevertheless he took up his salad fork with the uncomfortable consciousness that he had not been quite frank, and with the suspicion that the girl in white, sitting so composedly at his side, knew it.

CHAPTER XVIII

A HAZARD

As it chanced, Hamilton need have experienced no anxiety at being away from home during the evening for Penelope did not once awaken from the heavy slumber into which she had fallen. Until nearly midnight Catherine, half in fidelity and half in curiosity, with book in hand sat just across the threshold of the room Gordon's mother had formerly occupied; but no sound came from the sleeper within.

Nevertheless, the housekeeper could not read. Although the volume her fingers listlessly clasped was a tale of the absorbing variety she liked, and though there was nothing in the world she enjoyed better than a good story, to-night her mind wandered so persistently to the stranger in the nearby chamber that at last she put down the novel and gave free rein to fact, which on this particular occasion proved to be far more entertaining than fiction.

Who was this girl the master of the house had seen fit to bring home? Never within her remembrance had her inquisitiveness been so piqued. Hamilton's acquaintances comprised a circle of old Boston families who had been friends of his parents so long that she knew who most of them were. Frequently, too, he mentioned them; and when he went out he almost invariably told her where he was going. Hence she had kept close track of his goings and comings — or thought she had. But this girl! She was of a very different type from the women with whom the Hamiltons were wont to mingle.

There was, to be sure, refinement in her face, and the hallmarks of gentle breeding; but her clothing was of the plainest and some of it was actually threadbare. That she was not of Gordon's social world was perfectly evident. Where, then, had he met her, and why should he have brought her beneath his roof in this extraordinary fashion? Why, moreover, was he so strangely reticent regarding her? If he had rescued her from some unlucky dilemma, what more natural than that he should explain the circumstance? Surely half a century of service in a family merited a certain degree of confidence, especially if one was called in to aid in a situation so out of the common.

There was no denying the master was close-mouthed concerning his affairs and she conceded that he had the right to be so long as this silence related to his business interests; but his social relations were quite another matter, and in those she felt she had the right to share. Hanging over her head was there not always the possibility that he might some day marry? And as such an event would doubtless mean she would have to look elsewhere for a home, she could not but regard with anxiety every factor that seemed to advance this undesirable event. In addition she was, to do her justice, genuinely fond of Gordon and her pride in the Hamilton name engendered no small measure of worry as to what he might do. Men of his chivalry and fineness might be so easily imposed upon by scheming women. In terms of the vernacular, a vulgarity to which Catherine because of her Bostonianism seldom resorted, he was a great catch. Not only had he money, family and social prestige but he had also an unblemished reputation, a prosperous business, and a home spoiling for a mistress. That he had not married long ago was a marvel, a fortunate *miracle* that she had never been quite able to fathom.

At the time when his college chum, Jack Wilmot, had married, Gordon had been a great beau, and even for years afterward he had gone about first with one girl and then with another. Still his name had never been directly coupled with any one of them and in due time they had married and left him a bachelor. Then their daughters had grown up and he had squandered a fortune giving dinners, dances and theater parties for relays of buds. He took groups of débutantes and their friends to football games and boat races, and for a while seemed as youthful as any of them. And then, like their forbears, this band of associates had joined the ranks of the wedded and after bestowing on each a silver vase or Sheffield tray, and following it by a porringer for the first baby, he had seen them no more.

Once there had been a time when Catherine had thought he might marry Margaret Wilmot; but with the announcement of the girl's engagement that possibility was banished. Whether an actual romance had ever existed behind the friendship was a mystery. All she knew was that at forty-five Hamilton was still unmarried and did not appear to be ill content with his lot. He enjoyed his home and of late had spent more time in it than ever before, displaying a far greater interest in its details. He had had many of the fine old pieces of furniture repaired and repolished; had bought fresh hangings and had redecorated the entire mansion. The beautiful Hamilton silver, the property of three generations, had been dragged from the safe deposit vaults and placed upon the sideboard, and not only had the willow dinner set been matched up but an entirely new one of gold and white had augmented it. The bi-weekly order for flowers and plants, canceled after his mother's death, had been renewed and recently to her great delight he had even ventured to give a few modest dinners at his

own residence instead of at the club, and had apparently found his position as host a pleasant one. When women were included among his guests he usually invited some young matron of his acquaintance to preside at the table, and he was intensely particular that the small details of powder, perfume and flowers should not be missing from the dressing-table. Concerning feminine perquisites he was a connoisseur, not only because of years of training in purchasing such trifles for his mother, but because he seemed born with a seventh sense as to what women liked.

So closely had the faithful old servant studied the man, his tastes and fancies, his friends and disposition, that until to-night she had thought there was really very little about him that she did not know. She had pictured his life an open book every chapter of which, in general terms, she had read affectionately. Evidently, however, this supposition had been a fallacy. She really did not know Hamilton at all. Somehow, somewhere, was a web of interlaced events in the meshes of which he and the girl who lay sleeping in the adjoining room were entangled.

Not that Catherine thought evil of her master. Did not the Hamilton blood run in his veins, and could any Hamilton stoop to unworthy action? A true gentleman did not sully himself with mire. Yet even so, it was an indisputable fact that men were weak and foolish creatures where women were concerned, and that the older they grew the more weak and foolish they were liable to become. Many a man of unblemished reputation and acknowledged good sense had committed an inanity in his second blooming. Look at the women that widowers who had been blessed with peerless wives married! And think of the little fluffy-haired, brainless fools that cool-headed bachelors of middle age took unto their bosoms! Ah, Catherine had no illusions about the male of the

species. And because Gordon Hamilton was human, and in spite of his ancestors and his sound judgment was quite as likely to become involved in some nonsensical romance as were others of his kind, she experienced a pang of trepidation both on his account and her own. Probably he had pitied this girl. She knew he had an instinctive impulse always to shield womanhood and chivalrously place it on a pedestal, and although not for an instant did she harbor the suspicion that he would bring home and put into his mother's room a creature he did not believe to be blameless, she felt that, misled because of his very respect for the sex, he might readily be deceived.

Well, at least he had not been attracted by a pretty face; the gaunt, colorless stranger lying so still against the pillows could not by any stretch of the imagination be considered beautiful. She must have some other claim to his interest than mere physical attraction. What was it?

Thus meditated Catherine, who because of fifty years of a type of devotion no money could repay had come to say humbly in her heart, "Thy people shall be my people." And while she mused, old Roberts, seated in the lower hall and watching her in loyalty to the Hamiltons and all that concerned them, also scratched his gray locks, yawned and pondered. That the king could do no wrong was his gospel. But what did it all mean? Nor was it to be wondered at that when glasses of warm milk and egg-nogs were demanded of Mary, the venerable cook, she should have her questions. Who was ill?

All this speculating Hamilton had foreseen the day the taxicab whirled him home, and he sensed it even more vividly to-night when his car dropped him at his own door after the Wilmot dinner and he let himself in with his latchkey.

Catherine, on the qui vive for every sound, heard the jingle of the lock and came bustling to meet him. Here was the moment for which she had waited, the moment of revelation!

"Well?" interrogated Gordon, with an upward inflection of the voice.

"She has not wakened at all, Mr. Gordon."

"That's good."

"Do you —," the woman hesitated.

"You'd better go to bed, Catherine," broke in Hamilton kindly. "It is late and you must be tired. Leave the door into your room ajar so you can hear Miss Turner should she want anything. I doubt, however, if she does. The doctor said she would probably sleep right through the night without waking. I am going to turn in myself directly. I've had a busy day and am all in."

As he spoke he placed his hat and gloves on the bench nearby and moved suggestively toward the coat closet.

Catherine drew in her nostrils sharply. Did Hamilton actually mean to go to his room and leave her for the night with all these questions agitating the weary hours before her? It was incredible. Apparently such was his intention, for on discovering the faithful Roberts to be still up he rang for him to put out the lights, bade them both his habitually courteous good night, and with slow step mounted the stairs.

"You can call me, you know, should anything unusual be needed before morning," he called softly to the woman from the landing.

Ill satisfied with the course events had taken, the old housekeeper followed him reluctantly up the staircase and on seeing his door close, went on into the little chamber that for years had been hers. It was a small bedroom adjoining that which Gordon's mother had occupied, and many were the nights she had lain there in the darkness,

straining her ears for some sound from the sick woman whose comfort and well-being had been the primary interest of her life. To-night as she slipped out of her clothes, lighted the night lamp that sentiment had led her still to preserve as a relic of the past, and set the door between the rooms ajar, the experiences of the years that were gone came vividly back to her. She could see her beloved mistress now, delicate and beautiful against the pillows of the great mahogany four-poster. Even in her illness she had not lost her serene charm nor had the faint flush that colored her cheek and contrasted so prettily with her soft white hair faded. A dainty, intensely dependent woman she had been, with an abhorrence for the trend of modern times. About her everything in the house revolved and she reigned as completely from beneath the silken canopy of her bed as from a throne.

And yet there had come a day when even those who loved her best had prayed with bleeding hearts for her release from this world,—a day when it had seemed as if the aimlessly moving hands and the muttering tongue would never be at rest. In imagination the woman who had watched so devotedly over her heard again that rush of words and the uneasy rustle of the sheets as they were tossed to and fro.

"I must go on—I must finish it. I can't go home. But the money is almost gone. What shall I do? I mustn't ask Grandfather for more. Suppose it is all a failure—suppose it is—."

The voice trailed off into a babel of unmeaning phrases only to come back again and again to the plaint:

"Suppose I fail! Suppose I fail!"

In an instant Catherine was in her wrapper and slippers, and had tiptoed into the next room.

The girl had drawn herself up into a sitting posture

and, regarding her with wild, questioning eyes, babbled on brokenly about money and grandfather.

Once she whispered softly, "Dick is ashamed of me," and followed the statement with a bitter laugh that resounded with chilling vibration through the dimness.

When, however, Catherine approached her and threw a wrap over her thin shoulders she offered no protest other than to remark:

"But I shan't go home until it is done. I can't go — I can't go."

"Nobody is going to take you anywhere, my dear," the older woman said soothingly. "Just lie down and rest."

"Rest!" She sighed and wearily closed her eyes; but in a moment they opened again.

"You won't let them take me home?"

"No — no, indeed. Nobody is going to touch you."

The girl brought her face nearer and examined the one bending over her; then apparently satisfied by what she saw, she sank back on the pillows and once more shut her eyes.

The moment she was quiet Catherine sped to Hamilton's door and tapped.

"You will have to call Doctor Towner," said she hurriedly, when Gordon turned the key. "Miss Turner is in a high fever and delirious. I don't dare leave her or take the responsibility of letting her go on this way until morning. He'd better see her."

It was three o'clock when the physician arrived and Gordon, who had been anxiously pacing his room during his visit, descended into the hall to hear his verdict.

"Well?" The syllable was tense with concern.

"The girl is very ill, Gordon. There is no question about it. It may be brain fever or merely the result of weakness and fatigue. I cannot tell yet. But in any

case her parents would better be notified if they live at any great distance. You never can tell how an illness like this will turn. I suppose you can reach them, can't you?"

"They are at Belleport."

"Where's that?"

"On the Cape."

"Well, that's not bad. I'd communicate with them in the morning if I were you. You needn't alarm them unnecessarily. Still I think it might be just as well for them to be at hand."

He saw Gordon's face change from chagrin to consternation.

"I—I'm afraid it will take time to get hold of Miss Turner's family," he said. "You see, I know practically nothing of them."

"But you must know their names, man," the doctor exclaimed.

"I don't."

"You know nothing about this girl's people?"

"No."

There was a pause during which Gordon knew that the eyes of his inquisitor were boring into him. He was also conscious that the physician was waiting for the explanation he was determined not to give.

For a while they stood there in silence and then, turning, Doctor Towner picked up his overcoat.

"Pardon an old fellow, Gordon," he remarked, as he drew on his gloves, "but under the circumstances isn't your entire ignorance a bit curious?"

"Perhaps it is," admitted Hamilton with a shrug.

It was not, however, until the doctor had gone that the full force of his dilemma came to Hamilton. He was in an awkward plight, damned awkward. He had not expected his altruism would land him in such an em-

barrassing situation. It was going to look a little odd to people that he should be sheltering this young woman if the fact came to light. Of course, the thing was straight enough and could be explained. Nevertheless, he rather wished now he had taken somebody into his confidence. It would have been far wiser to have told the Wilmots or at the outset stated a few of the conditions to Catherine and Roberts. But he had been so eager to protect Penelope in her wretched extremity from the prying gaze of the world that he had erred and perhaps as a result put both her and himself in a compromising light. Certainly for a stranger he had assumed a great deal in bringing her to his home without her knowledge or consent, worthy as had been his motive.

Viciously he gnawed at his cigar. As the thing had turned out it was, he repeated, damned awkward. What was he to do now?

Of course the girl's grandfather might be named Turner and in that instance might be located with only a moderate amount of trouble; but on the other hand he might bear the name of the other side of the house. It was idiotic to telephone to Belleport for information concerning so nebulous a person as the grandfather of a young woman who a few months before had come to Boston. Doubtless a score of ambitious females in the town had grandfathers whom they had left behind them in this same ultra-modern fashion.

Hamilton tossed aside his cigar and gnawed his lip. A nice mess he was in. He had followed a mad, quixotic impulse and he was now reaping its harvest. How the girl's family would curse him for his interference — and she, too, probably!

Then an inspiration came to him. There was Dick Morton! He would know about Penelope's relatives.

To be sure, Hamilton did not know his address but without doubt he could be reached at Mr. Wilmot's office. That meant, however, dragging the Wilmots in and eventually bestowing on Margaret a confidence he had withheld until circumstances forced him into tardy candor. Of course she would resent this. Women were very touchy, especially where other women were concerned, and very sensitive, too. Moreover, how was it going to be possible to give her the facts without telling her not only of Penelope's poverty and helplessness, but of her love affair with Dick Morton,—all circumstances Hamilton shrunk from betraying? And then arose the greatest question of all: if Penelope herself were able to decide the matter, would she wish to have young Morton summoned to her aid? Might not their relation be such that to find herself in his debt would be vastly disagreeable to her?

Never within his memory, sighed Gordon, had he acted so short-sightedly as in this affair. And as he now surveyed the dilemma he was in he was compelled to own that at rock bottom the motive that had really impelled him was selfishness and not the philanthropy he had tried to blind himself into believing it. It had been primarily to foster his own good fortune that he had been so eager to nurse Penelope Turner back to life. She held a measure of prosperity for him in her hands and so loth was he to see harm come to her he had determined to befriend her at any cost, put her on her feet again and keep her within view until he was assured the masterpiece she had produced was his to publish. At bottom the scheme, when stripped of sentiment and romance and exposed to the cold, pitiless glare of the actual, was purely a business one. And now Fate had suddenly intervened and as a rebuke to his greed for worldly prosperity brought him face to face with the possibility of a tragic termina-

tion to the plan that had appeared on the surface so workable. If censure followed his act he confessed with honesty he deserved it.

Yet, to do him justice, he cared far less what might be said of him in the present instance than he did for what might be said of the sick girl upstairs. It had been his pride that he had led a very conventional and circumspect life which had never given scandalmongers the chance to bandy his name about. Now he suddenly realized that no man's good name is beyond the reach of attack and that he was involved in a web of happenings which, although irreproachable in themselves, might readily lend themselves to gossip. This criticism he could face out if need be. His past reputation should serve him as a helpful ally; besides, a man can always meet a challenge. But if blame should attach itself to the girl he had so unwittingly enmeshed with himself that was a more vital matter and a calamity for which he should never forgive himself.

In view of the web of circumstances might it not be wiser to take the risk and disregard Doctor Towner's warning, maintain silence and see what the coming day brought forth? Towner was habitually cautious and might be needlessly alarmed. If it were possible to avoid communicating with young Morton, Gordon much preferred to do so. Moreover, well as he knew the Wil-mots, and dearly as he cherished their friendship, he recoiled from divulging either to them or to anybody else Penelope's pitiful story. By chance he had stumbled upon a confidence the girl herself would without question never voluntarily have given him. Was it not a sacred possession to be guarded from the outside world?

Yes, he would choose the lesser evil and take the hazard of delay. If the girl upstairs was no worse in the

morning he might be glad he had disobeyed Towner, whom he suspected of being quite as much concerned in watching with fatherly care over his morals as he was in looking out for the health of Miss Penelope Turner.

CHAPTER XIX

MASKED FACES

PERHAPS had Gordon Hamilton foreseen how far this decision was to lead him he would have adopted another course of action. But the future is a shrouded figure and it lifted its veil no more considerately for Hamilton than for the rest of the world. Hence he moved blindly on, groping his way a step at a time.

With the morning Penelope proved to be no better; in fact, she was, if anything, slightly worse. Her temperature had, to be sure, dropped; and the delirium had ceased, but she was alarmingly weak and lay in a sort of coma from which she failed to rouse.

"It is chiefly exhaustion," Doctor Towner declared. "The girl is worn out mentally and physically. Rest will do her more good than anything else. You don't know what she has been doing to get in such a condition do you, Gordon?"

"Oh, just overworking at her job, I'm afraid," answered Hamilton with airy indefiniteness.

"Heard from her family yet?"

"No."

"Well, perhaps it is just as well they haven't all piled up here. There seems to be no immediate cause for alarm and they couldn't do any good." He looked shrewdly at Hamilton. "However, it is prudent to have them near at hand. The girl isn't out of the woods yet by any means."

If he entertained any doubts as to his orders being obeyed, at least the physician did not betray them and he soon went away promising he would send a nurse to relieve Catherine.

After he had gone Gordon loitered a moment in the hall to glance over the paper; then he took up his gloves and hat. Evidently he could be of no further use at home and he therefore determined to walk to the office instead of riding. A stroll across the Common would be refreshing and give him the chance to think things out. But as he moved toward the door Catherine intercepted him.

"Miss Turner still seems very ill," began she without preamble.

"Yes, I am afraid she is."

"Do her family know?"

"Not yet."

The housekeeper raised her brows.

"But you are going to tell them. They may prefer to take her home."

"I hardly think so. Besides, she is now too ill to be moved."

"You mean to keep her here?"

"I see no other way."

The woman lapsed into silence.

"If you object to the care of her, or find it too strenuous, of course I can engage another nurse," continued Gordon.

"Oh, it's not that. You know I am quite used to sickness."

"Then what —"

A sharp note in Gordon's voice warned the old servant to interrupt him with the reproachful words:

"Of course, Mr. Gordon, you must know I am always glad to do anything I can for any friend of yours."

"Thanks, Catherine. I was sure you felt that way. It is bully of you. If you will just help me this time I shall greatly appreciate it."

"I will, sir," was the meek reply.

The triumph was one Gordon Hamilton almost invariably won over those with whom he came in contact. He was a born conqueror of men.

"You're a brick!" was all he said in acknowledgment of his victory.

He beamed on her a moment with the smile that never failed to disarm and then went out and once more she was left with her accumulation of unanswered questions.

Throughout the day Hamilton took no one into his confidence. He walked meditatively to the office, went through the business routine his position demanded and beyond discussing Miss Turner's novel, *Granite and Clay*, with Mr. Beck he did not mention her name. Nevertheless it was evident that the enthusiasm of the editorial office with regard to the manuscript gratified him exceedingly,—almost as much, confided one reader to another, as if the book had been his own. That Penelope was not in reality out of his thoughts was also evinced by the fact that in the afternoon he left for home a trifle earlier than was his wont, striding along the crowded pavements with feverish haste and crossing the street diagonally at the risk of being slaughtered by an on-coming automobile in order to avoid a chat with Nathalie Sears whom he saw approaching.

"I suppose Catherine is with Miss Turner, Roberts," were his first words on entering the house and encountering the old butler.

"No, sir. The nurse has come and I believe Catherine left her in charge."

"Ah! Then Catherine is at leisure. Hunt her up *and if she is not resting* ask her to come to the library."

As the old man's aged feet shuffled through the hall and up the stairs in fulfillment of his errand, Hamilton went into the library and waited. This was the only room on the street floor with which he ever felt on intimate terms. Here he sat and read, wrote and smoked; and here, before an open fire, he often dreamed an evening away when he was too tired to do any of these things. The reception room adjoining it and the stately drawing-room upstairs with its stiff brocade furniture and crowded bric-a-brac smacked of the artificial. But the library was essentially a man's room. It had been his father's stronghold and it had now become his. The shelves of books that flanked the walls, the solid mahogany furniture, the great desk all belonged to the world of things he knew and loved. So, too, did the paintings which although dingy with age bore the imprint of master hands. The senior Hamilton had been fond of pictures — good ones — and had squandered no small portion of his income on their purchase. Gordon could recall now his mother's confidential touch on his arm and her whispered caution:

"If you are going to that exhibition with your father, Gordon, don't let him buy any more pictures."

The admonition had become a by-word in the family and the adherence to it a cause of regret to many a struggling artist.

This taste for art Gordon had inherited; and although he never had yielded to it to the extent his father had, nevertheless he watched the world of creative production with intelligent interest and usually found time to visit the exhibitions of such crafts as appealed to him. The room in which he now sat bore ample evidence of this for a finely woven Indian basket held his letters; rugs that mirrored the Oriental's years of patient toil covered the floor; there were carvings, an exquisite Japanese crys-

tal set in bronze, and bits of ivory, copper and enamel converted by the skill of the trained workman into objects choice and rare. And yet so large was the interior that none of these treasures forfeited their beauty or individuality. Each was given plenty of space and in suitable setting reigned supreme in its allotted corner. A visitor could not but sense on entering the room that its furnishings had been selected and put in place by one who understood and loved them.

As Hamilton now waited it was characteristic that he took out his handkerchief and flecked a particle of lint from the flawless sphere the dragon's bronze claw enclosed.

He was, in fact, in the process of doing this when Catherine surprised him.

"Ah, good evening, Catherine," said he, abashed at being caught dusting his possessions.

"You're not finding dust on that crystal, are you, Mr. Gordon?" complained she in an aggrieved tone.

"No, indeed!" was the hasty reply. "Only a speck of lint."

"There couldn't be lint on it," returned she. "I did this room myself to-day and I always use a silk duster."

"Oh, it's nothing," protested Gordon, "nothing at all! The house is like waxwork, Catherine. It is a marvel to me how you keep it so clean in a dirty city like this."

"Cities are dirty," agreed the housekeeper with mollified intonation.

Her expectant eyes were upon him and to this expectancy Gordon was not blind. Persistently, however, he ignored it.

"And how is your patient?" he asked.

"She is much better to-night, sir. Her mind is quite clear and she has been asking no end of questions."

"What sort of questions?"

"Oh, she wanted to know where she was, and how she got here. Not that I was able to enlighten her," continued the housekeeper with significant stiffness. "Of course I knew even less about it than she did." She paused for the words to take full effect. "At first she seemed to think I was evading her but when she found I really could not tell her anything she insisted she must see you as soon as you came in."

"But isn't she too weak to talk? Won't it be bad for her?"

"She is weak, Mr. Gordon. Still, I think it would do her less harm to see you and satisfy her mind than to lie still and wonder until she cannot sleep."

"Perhaps it would. Why don't you call up Doctor Towner and ask his opinion?"

"I did call him up and he was not there. His secretary said he was out of town on a case and would not be in until late to-night."

"Then, I see no help for it but to decide ourselves. What did Miss Turner's nurse think?"

"She feels as I do, sir."

"Very well. Won't you tell her I will come up whenever she wishes to have me?"

"I will, sir. Yes."

Left alone, Gordon rose, straightening a picture here, a book there. Automatically he reached for a cigarette, his usual remedy for nervousness, and started to light it; then tossed it aside. Suppose Penelope should be indignant when she learned how high-handedly he had assumed the management of her affairs? She certainly had the right to demand the credentials on which he claimed his authority. Was there not the danger that in her anger she might work herself into a fever and so seriously aggravate her feeble condition as to retard or even jeopardize her progress? If so, Towner would dub

him a fool for granting the interview and precipitating a crisis, and he should blame himself. The whole affair, as he had many times before mentally observed, was awkward, damned awkward.

"Miss Turner will see you now, sir," announced Catherine, breaking in upon his thoughts.

Gordon flushed at the thrill of trepidation that passed over him. Doubtless it was a tremor of apprehension such as this that his own summons had more than once called forth in an embryonic author awaiting arraignment before him. It was an uncomfortable sensation and he vowed inwardly that in future he would have more sympathy for those who experienced it.

Penelope, languid against the pillows, was propped up beneath the canopy of the great bed where through weary years he had been accustomed to see his mother lie; and as he beheld the outline of the slender form over which the sheets stretched something caught at his throat, forcing a mist into his eyes, and prompting him to turn his head aside. The impulse, however, was fleeting and immediately he banished it and looked again. Yes, the picture before him was quite a different one from that which imagination had for the moment so trickily conjured up. With hair rippling loosely over her shoulders the girl lay waiting, her eyes, large and luminous under their touch of fever, fixed expectantly on the door. A negligée of pale violet silk that his mother had at one time worn accentuated the purple shadows beneath her delicate skin and made her look pitifully fragile and ill. She regarded him gravely as he approached.

"Please sit down," she said, indicating a chair the nurse had placed at the bedside. "I want you to tell me how I came to be here."

There was only puzzlement and mystification in the question and relieved that there was no resentment, Gor-

don, in a low voice, related the facts as simply as he could.

"I remember fearing I might collapse," the girl murmured, when the story was done. "Certainly you have been most kind, Mr. Hamilton. But why did you not take me to my lodgings? You had the address."

He hesitated.

"I was not sure," answered he gently, "who would be there to take care of you. City people do not always contract to nurse those who live beneath their roofs." He smiled lightly.

"I suppose not," Penelope returned, apparently only half satisfied by the reply. "But surely you do not always adopt the generous custom of bringing home all writers who faint in your office."

"I don't remember that any of our authors ever fainted there before."

"Then the precedent is new."

"U — m — yes; perhaps it is."

"It is an immensely kind one." She eyed him as if to fathom what lay beneath his words. "It has made a great deal of trouble for your household, I'm afraid, and you, too."

"We all were glad to do what we could," Hamilton protested quickly. "What is a house for if not to use?"

"They tell me you live here alone."

"With my mother's old servants, yes."

"And Mrs. McPhearson?"

"Eh? Oh, Catherine, you mean; she has been here almost fifty years — a sort of companion, nurse, house-keeper for my mother. Now her duty is to look out for me." He tried to speak whimsically.

"She has been very, very good."

"She is accustomed to illness. My mother was an invalid a long time."

"Ah, that explains it. I felt she knew just what to do. How quickly one recognizes the skilled touch! But I am much better now, thanks to her nursing," went on Penelope, "and shall not need to encroach either on your kindness or hers. I shall be able to go back home — to my boarding place, I mean — to-morrow and I wanted to ask if you would arrange to take me there."

"But you mustn't think of going yet, Miss Turner," Gordon burst out. "Doctor Towner would not listen to it for an instant," he paused the fraction of a second and then added, "and neither would I."

"But of course I can't stay on here, Mr. Hamilton."

"Why not?"

"Why — why, for a score of reasons. In the first place there is not the smallest excuse in the world for me to remain here and turn your house upside down. Oh, yes, that is precisely what I am doing," she insisted, as he held up a protesting hand. "I know the upheaval doctors and nurses cause. We are under obligations to meet such emergencies cheerfully when they involve our own kin; but no one is bound to endure their inconvenience for the sake of an utter stranger."

"Do you consider yourself a stranger to me?"

"Yes. Don't you?"

Under his scrutiny he saw her color.

"I am afraid that is not entirely honest," she amended hurriedly. "Of course, after what you have done you never again can be simply a stranger."

"I did not mean that," the man objected. "What I meant was that after reading *Granite and Clay* you cannot claim to be a stranger to me."

For the first time a light of genuine pleasure flashed from her eyes into his.

"It was because of my — my interest, admiration, belief in your book that I brought you here," he went on

steadily. "Your novel is going to succeed; but there are certain revisions that must be made first and I am anxious to have you make them yourself."

"I felt perhaps things might have to be done to it," she confessed.

"If you will consent to remain here until you are a little stronger," continued Hamilton, without heeding the interruption, "and then let me get some one to help you make the changes the manuscript demands, I shall be very much gratified."

"It is only because of the book, then," said she very low, as if meditating aloud.

He waited, allowing her to think.

Then presently she said, "Well, Mr. Hamilton, I will take you at your word and what I would not accept personally, or from charity, I will accept for the sake of my work. It must, however, be with the agreement that I myself defray all expenses incident to my illness."

With what pride she uttered the condition! One would have thought her a princess whose silken purse was crowded with gold rather than a penniless struggler whose pitifully worn and flat little pocketbook Hamilton had picked up from the floor of the taxi and slipped into his overcoat pocket.

To the demand she made he nodded.

"You may do as you like about that," he said.

"I might not be able to meet the expenses at once," explained she with dignity, "but I could clear the debt in time and —"

"But the bills are nothing," Gordon returned, unable to bear the shade of anxiety that had gathered in her eyes. "We'll turn them in to the firm and label them publishing expenses. We repair all our other machinery when it gets out of order. Why not you?"

"Am I just a machine?"

"Authors are a very necessary part of the machinery of a publishing house," responded Hamilton in a matter-of-fact tone. "Without them the whole structure of our business would go down."

"I suppose so."

"Then why not leave it at that," pleaded he eagerly. "We put you back in condition to work because we need you and cannot do without you."

"You really believe you are going to make enough on *Granite and Clay* to reimburse you for all this trouble and expense?" was the incredulous inquiry.

"I do not think so — I know it."

"Your faith is superb."

"At least it is complete and sincere."

For a moment neither of them spoke. Then the man asked:

"You will stay?"

"Yes, if you really wish it. I never can thank you, Mr. Hamilton. You see —"

To cut short what he feared might follow Gordon rose.

"I must not let you talk any longer," he observed abruptly. "See, here comes your nurse to send me away" — as the white-capped attendant approached from the farther end of the room — "and it is high time she did too." Then looking down at the girl beneath the canopy he concluded, "Remember you are in an entirely independent position. Whatever you wish you are to ask for just as if you were in your own home, and I hope earnestly that you will."

The final sentence was uttered with the entreaty that constituted one of Hamilton's greatest charms.

"Thank you," repeated Penelope.

Noticing her lip trembled ominously, Gordon moved away.

"I shall not intrude upon you," he added, smiling

kindly. "All is, any time you wish to see me send word to me by Mrs. McPhearson or your nurse. I arrive home shortly after five every afternoon and am always at leisure. Good night."

"Good night," responded Penelope.

A second they regarded each other, seeking to penetrate the other's mask and determine how much each knew — or guessed. Then the man went out, softly closing the door behind him.

CHAPTER XX

PENELOPE'S DECISION

HAD one echo of the personal note vibrated in Hamilton's plea Penelope would have refused to remain a guest beneath his roof. But the man had been so grossly businesslike. Apparently, mused she with a cynical little smile, she was, in her host's estimation no better than paper, ink, or some other publishing commodity. Yes, perhaps she was a degree better, for at least if she were only paper she was not blank paper; she was manuscript and evidently Beck and Hamilton considered manuscript of sufficient importance to guard it from injury. How cold-blooded and commercial the world was! That she herself was living a tragedy far more vital than anything she had written or ever could write they did not suspect, and if they had they probably would not have cared. To them she represented nothing but money; and just as the operatic manager protects the welfare of his prima donna, or the sportsman the health of his racing horse, so Mr. Gordon Hamilton was taking every care to see that she was restored to the full power of her faculties. It was galling, humiliating.

Nevertheless, unflattering as it was, she could not but own that it was a more acceptable attitude than pity, and that the aid had come at a crisis, when, if compelled to rely on her own resources, she could no longer have held out. The remittance her grandfather mailed her *monthly* she had long ago discovered to be inadequate,

and of late she had been supplementing it by addressing envelopes until far into the night, a tedious process and one bringing only small returns, but the sole work she could find to eke out enough so that she might be enabled to stay in the city and complete the work upon which she had set her heart.

As she looked back over the weeks of unceasing toil that had now spelled success she speculated with a shudder what would have become of her had Gordon Hamilton's decision been an adverse one. To a single spin of the dice she had entrusted her fate. If the gamble on which she had staked her all had proved a failure, not only would she have wasted her grandfather's hard-earned savings but she would also have shaken what little confidence he held in her ability and been compelled to return to the Cape defeated. Nobody but he had had the least conviction that she could write and even his faith was feeble and wavering. Deep in his soul she knew he had doubted whether she had the capacity to pen anything worthy of financial return. As for her aunts, they thought her mad and only refrained from telling her so because they feared their father's displeasure. On Belleport itself no restraining hand rested and its ignorance of what had brought her to the city had prevented it from jeering openly and denouncing her for the rainbow chaser her father had been. Ah, she knew where every one of the unbelievers stood!

But in spite of all lack of encouragement, in spite of veiled ridicule, stubbornly she had trusted in her star; and behold, at last it had risen! She could scarcely realize it. Like a bird let loose, north, south, east and west was to wing the hitherto captive soul of her, fluttering to she knew not what havens. The fancy thrilled her imagination. How strange to picture others reading her inmost thoughts and feelings, and perhaps reëchoing

them — how strange and almost terrifying! It seemed impossible that Gordon Hamilton could read words that came so close to the heart of any human being and still look upon them simply as a bit of merchandise. And yet, under the circumstances, perhaps it was fortunate and less embarrassing that he should do so, for were they to approach what she had written from any other angle they would soon find themselves on ground so personal that it would be disconcerting to both. Publishers like Hamilton doubtless handled so many books that in the course of time they became blunted to their appeal and incapable of any spontaneous reaction to them. It was not to be wondered at.

Nevertheless, notwithstanding the reasonableness of these arguments, there was something in Hamilton's face that failed to bear them out and mark him as a callous, unfeeling, materialistic man. She could easily stretch her imagination to the point of hearing him voice a kinder and less worldly motto than "Business is business." If, however, this surmise had any foundation it was apparent that on this occasion, at least, he did not elect to adopt another slogan. Business was business and that was all there was about it; and probably it would have made no difference if he had known she was actually starving and had not had a whole night's sleep for weeks? But he did not know, thank Heaven! Nobody knew and nobody ever should — her aunts and her grandfather, least of all. By a happy turn of circumstance she had escaped from the necessity of imparting her secret to any one and when her work was finished she would be able to return home in triumph, never confessing how close upon defeat had verged her victory.

Her chief needs being rest and food, and both of these being supplied without stint, it was astonishing how *speedily* her strength returned. Every condition for re-

covery was favorable. Failure had always been a dwarfing, depressing influence under which her mercurial temperament sank to its lowest ebb. But success was an elixir, a tonic. Perhaps it was sympathy she needed more than actual approval. Be that as it may, the fact remained that censure never urged her to the heights that commendation did. The only other spur that drove her forward was pride and whipped on by the stinging lash of this taunting tyrant she sometimes leaped to instant and, alas, illogical and ill-advised action. In the same ratio that praise was her good angel pride was but too frequently her evil genius.

Lying there in the quiet room of Hamilton's home, listening to the far-away droning of the city's undercurrent, it was as if she were upon another planet looking down on the world in which she had previously dwelt. What a wretched failure it had been,— the lonely years of her childhood, and the still more companionless years spent in her grandfather's house. Nobody about her had understood, and had it not been for a love that compensated her dependent position would have been pitiable indeed. And then had come Dick Morton and with him more failure. It seemed to have been failure, failure, failure from the day she was born.

Perhaps, owned she, she had been too introspective and too deeply concerned with the impression she was making on other people. If so, that sin was now no more, for since coming to Boston she had been too busy and too tired either to pull her character to fragments or care what the hurrying world thought of her. In fact, she had awakened to the discovery that probably it did not think about her at all. She was only one of a million toilers, whose identity was lost in a city struggle for existence. Of what use to resort to the dramatic and act a part for spectators who took no heed? In Belleport it

had been different; she had not lacked an audience there. Here no one looked, cared, wept or applauded. She was just Penelope — Penelope Turner — a Penelope who at the brink of despair had been snatched from annihilation and crowned with success.

Under the miracle of it this re-created being blossomed like a rare flower until those watching her marveled at her transformation. The dust of golden freckles that had flecked her cheeks disappeared, leaving her skin exquisite in its fairness and pink with a warm, girlish tint; her eyes sparkled like stars in a shadowy pool and hope, raising the drooping corners of her mouth, curved them into a smile irresistible in its radiance.

"Why, the child is actually pretty!" exclaimed Mrs. McPhearson in consternation to the nurse. "Whatever has come over her? She was the scrawniest, palest little thing you ever saw when she came."

Penelope, regarding herself in the oval mirror of the low dressing table the first day she was up and alone in the room, shared their wonder. Was this the same girl who had lain crying in the lee of the old green dory on the Belleport sands? It seemed incredible. She smiled at her new self in the glass, laughing aloud with pleasure and excitement. What would Mr. Gordon Hamilton think when he came home? Ever since his talk with her he had been in New York where he had been called on business incident to a printer's strike. She had not seen him for over a week. Before his departure he must by some effectual means have silenced his household, for no one had sought to question her or had even allowed her to venture anything more than the most fragmentary allusions to herself or her affairs. This, she decided, was probably in compliance with the doctor's orders. Even the physician himself, who made cheery little visits and *chatted* pleasantly whenever he came, never inquired

about her personal concerns and even cut short any reference to them. Had she but known it Doctor Towner was too proud to gain his information this way and had decided that if Gordon Hamilton did not choose to impart to him any information about the stranger within his gates he did not care to receive it from other sources.

But Penelope, in ignorance of his motive, knew only that to all appearances nobody entertained the slightest curiosity as to who she was or where she had come from; and within the peace of this belief she ceased to be haunted further by the obligation to outline her history or explain to those surrounding her the riddle of her past. Tranquil mentally, her native charm began gradually to assert itself until it won to her colors not only the doctor and the nurse, but the half-grudging Catherine as well. For steel one's heart as one might Penelope, under the spell of happiness and with her mummeries and masquerading cast aside, was a most naïve, irresistible creature.

"Don't you think I might dispense with a nurse soon?" she queried of Doctor Towner one day, when he was making his daily visit. "And can't I be getting back to work before long?"

The physician caught eagerly at the interrogation.

"That would depend on the sort of work you want to do," replied he guardedly.

"Oh, I do not aspire to go out and saw wood," smiled she, with tantalizing indefiniteness.

He joined in the smile. It was the sort that compelled one to.

"I mean nice, quiet, ladylike work," she continued. "Work that I could do right here."

"Crocheting or knitting socks?"

She laughed.

"Something almost as bad."

He watched her. During her illness she had piqued his interest more than he would have been willing to admit; now that she was on the high road to health and her personality had begun to assert itself, his curiosity concerning her had doubled. It would have been so easy to ask a question or two and satisfy his inquisitiveness. But the interrogations stopped at his tongue's end, a blending of honor and stubbornness holding them back. After all, the affair was none of his. Nevertheless, he had been too long associated with the Hamilton family to be able wholly to quell a certain sense of pride in and responsibility for Gordon's conduct. He hoped with all his heart the young man was doing nothing foolish. He had, during his years of practice, seen much of human nature and had come to the somewhat pessimistic conclusion that there was not a man in the world, no matter what his inheritance or traditions, who, if given provocation, was beyond the possibility of making an ass of himself. It was an unflattering estimate of his sex but it was a true one and he saw no reason why Gordon Hamilton, unblemished as was his record, should be an exception to the general rule. The present might be his era of folly, that was all.

Nevertheless, try as he would he had not, he was forced to admit, up to the moment discovered anything that pointed follyward.

Miss Everts, the nurse, left on Friday and Saturday night Gordon came home.

"Well, Roberts, how goes it?" he asked as the old butler took possession of his luggage and began to mount the stairs with it in his hand.

"Nicely, sir."

"And how is Miss Turner?"

"Getting on splendidly, they tell me. The nurse went *to-day*."

"You don't say so! That is fine. I suppose Miss Turner has not been downstairs yet."

"Oh, no, sir."

"Well, it is good to be home again, Roberts," Gordon sighed, dismissing the subject. "New York is all well enough for a holiday but for steady diet I would as soon live in Hades."

"I imagine so," politely acquiesced the butler whose knowledge of the Empire State consisted only in listening to the periodic pæans of gratitude his master was wont to offer upon his return to his native city.

Gordon strolled into the library and without opening the letters piled on his desk he glanced at their addresses with faint interest; then he looked about the quiet room, yawned and went slowly upstairs.

In the upper hall Catherine met him.

"Ah, Mr. Gordon, it is grand to see you home again!" exclaimed she. "The house is never the same with you out of it. And what kind of a trip did you have? I'll be bound you're glad to be back again."

"Indeed I am!"

"There's no place like Boston," announced the old servant with true Beacon Street enthusiasm.

"I guess the New Yorkers would agree with you there!" laughed Gordon mischievously.

Catherine tossed her head.

"New York was always a Sodom and Gomorrah," she asserted solemnly.

"And how is your patient?" questioned Hamilton, cutting short the philippic he was sure would follow. Catherine was more sophisticated than Roberts; some twenty years ago she had once been in New York.

"Oh, Miss Turner has made great progress within the week, sir. You will be surprised to see her. She is up and about the room; the nurse has gone and Doctor

Towner doesn't think he will need to come more than a few times after to-morrow."

"Splendid! You are a magician, Catherine. I believe you could bring the dead to life! Don't you suppose Miss Turner would be able to come downstairs to dinner to-night?" suggested he.

"To-night? You mean right now?"

"Yes. Why not?"

"Why — eh — I don't know! I never thought of her going down. I suppose —"

"Isn't she well enough?"

"Why — why, yes — I guess she is."

"Then won't you ask her if she would like to?"

The housekeeper hesitated.

"I — I — can ask her of course, sir," answered she, "but I am afraid she won't accept."

"You think she won't feel like it?"

"I can't say as to that, sir. It is only that having no luggage with her she has nothing suitable to wear."

"Nonsense! Had she trunks of gowns with her I should not think of letting her fatigue herself by putting any of them on. I shall be quite alone and we all understand she has been ill. Let her come as she is."

Catherine, bred in the proprieties, threw up her hands.

"In a wrapper! Oh, sir, she couldn't do that — not in the dining room and at dinner."

"My mother wore wrappers downstairs," declared Gordon sharply.

"That was quite different, sir. And they weren't wrappers; they were tea gowns."

"There's everything in a name. Well, why can't Miss Turner wear a tea gown?"

"She has none with her, sir."

"There must be things in the house."

"You mean — ?"

"Certainly."

"You'd be willing she should wear them?" There was awe and wonder in the words.

"Yes," Gordon repeated a trifle irritably. "Why should we hoard things when they can be of use?"

The woman did not answer but her silence was eloquent with protest.

"Well, I'll see what can be found, Mr. Gordon," she at last responded, turning toward the hall with evident reluctance.

"Do not urge Miss Turner to come if she is tired, or does not care to," he called after her.

"No, sir."

A moment later the stillness of his chamber was broken by a gentle knock.

"It is I, sir — Catherine."

"Yes." Turning the knob, he confronted the old servant.

"It is just as I fancied, sir. Miss Turner asks you to excuse her."

The man's face clouded.

"She is not up to it, eh?"

"Oh, it isn't that. She is perfectly able to go down and I even think it might do her good. It's her clothes. She says it is unsuitable for her to dine with you unless she has a proper dress."

"That's all rot!" burst out Gordon with boyish peevishness. "What earthly difference does it make what she wears?" There'll be nobody but me to see her, and I am quite used to invalids. Of course she would not choose to dine in one of those wrapper things. But under the circumstances isn't she being rather silly? I shall just have to dine alone downstairs and she alone up. I call it nonsense."

"I told her what you said."

"Well, go back and tell her again. Say that I am asking a favor of her and that I very much hope she will grant it."

"I will, sir."

Some little interval elapsed before he again heard Catherine's knock and during the interim less because he wished to make a good appearance than from force of habit and the refreshment of putting on fresh clothing, he got into his dinner coat. But all the time he was dressing his thoughts ran on Penelope. Now that he had made the request to see her it was absurd how anxious he was to have it conceded. It was stupid to eat one's meals alone, argued he, seeking to justify to himself his impatience.

Then he heard Catherine's approach.

"Well, what luck this time?" he asked as he threw wide the door.

"Miss Turner will come down, sir."

"That's more like it! Tell her I am very glad."

"Don't you think, sir, that if she does Roberts had better light the fires in the dining room and the library? The downstairs rooms are larger, and as they do not get so much sun they're liable to be cooler. I shouldn't want her to notice a difference of temperature and get cold."

"That is a wise caution. I'll speak to him as I go down."

A blaze was soon crackling on the library hearth and into a great leather chair before it Hamilton sank and began without enthusiasm to open his letters. They represented an accumulation of social correspondence and consisted chiefly of appeals for charity and notes of invitation to dinners or week-end house parties. The one he held suspended between his fingers and which was written on heavy gray paper surmounted by a crest bade him to Manchester for the coming Sunday. He tossed it

across to the table at his elbow with a gesture significant of refusal. He had other and very different plans for the spring days that were now transforming Boston from a bleak city of sleet and east winds to a fairyland of flowers. Already the trees shading the Public Garden were feathery with green and the tulip beds beneath them a riot of color. Even within the iron-fenced enclosure before his own door the sun had lured into early bloom daffodils, hyacinths and spikes of Scilla blue as the May-time skies. The Embankment, framed in the heavy hangings that adorned his library windows, was at the very moment gay with hurrying pedestrians, emerald turf, and the flashing splendor of crimson-flooded waters. No, he had no intention of leaving all this beauty behind him and exchanging the city either for the Berkshires or the North Shore. Instead he looked forward to long, quiet evenings in Boston, when with Penelope Turner beside him at his great library desk they should together remodel the romance, *Granite and Clay*.

CHAPTER XXI

AUTHOR AND PUBLISHER

HAD not Gordon Hamilton been a man long schooled in suppressing his emotions he undoubtedly would have betrayed surprise when he looked up and beheld Penelope standing between the portières of the library door. So quiet had been her entrance that against a background of soft green she stood unheralded, a shy and hesitating figure. Catherine had discovered tucked away in a drawer a tea gown of softest white crepe which Gordon had bought for his mother on her last birthday and which she had never worn. Probably it would have been given away long ago, as had most of Mrs. Hamilton's other clothing, had it not been overlooked. The moment Hamilton's eye fell upon it he recognized it, and recalling the circumstances under which it had been purchased, a momentary pang of sadness shot through him. And yet, strangely enough, to see the dress on Penelope now created no unpleasant sensation. Rather it seemed to make of her a thing apart and link her with a chain of associations not only sacred but deeply precious.

He gazed at her in silence and gravely she met his eyes; then she smiled timidly and in a twinkling became a very human creature who in her clinging robes brought with her a memory of golden sunshine, blue skies, sea, sand, wild roses, laughter and youth. Her hair was parted demurely on her forehead and coiled without a pretense of art at the nape of her neck, and yet no studied coiffure could have been in more perfect harmony with

her simple costume. The Penelope of the past would have scorned at such a dramatic moment to make so ineffective an entrance; but the new Penelope, weak from illness and wearied by months of combat with the very real things of life, had experienced something that rendered the jester's cap and bells trivial and out of tune.

Unaffected, too, was the gesture with which the girl came forward to meet her host's outstretched hand. As Hamilton led her toward the fire and placed a chair before the blaze, stooping as he did so to arrange the pillows with practiced skill, he was conscious of a fresh charm in her bearing, a new and pleasing dignity.

"How vastly better you are looking, Miss Turner," he exclaimed impulsively.

"I am better, Mr. Hamilton. In fact, thanks to your hospitality, I am not the same person at all."

It was on the tip of his tongue to observe that she was a much more fascinating person, and had there been a trace of coquetry in her words he would probably have voiced the opinion; but the sincerity in her manner forbade flattery and instead he replied with gravity:

"You must thank your doctor and nurses for your improved health. I can claim no part of the cure, I am afraid, except to rejoice in it. You begin to look really fit for work."

"I am not only fit but eager," returned Penelope. "When do you think we can make our start?"

The pronoun rang in Gordon's ear with delightful camaraderie.

"Soon. To-morrow, perhaps, if your several guardians give you permission."

"Doctor Towner and Mrs. McPhearson, you mean? I am sure they will," replied Penelope, looking brightly into his face. "I am quite strong now and am anxious to get the book done as soon as I can."

"Why such haste?"

"Didn't you yourself tell me you were in a hurry for it? Besides, I have already encroached on your kindness an unpardonably long time."

"Nonsense! Why, you have only been here a week."

"A week in which I have contrived to turn your serene abode into a hospital and make everybody a lot of trouble."

"I wish you would not regard your coming here in that light," frowned Hamilton. She saw he was genuinely annoyed. "Why can't you take it as it was offered and let the matter rest there? I should be immensely grateful if you would."

"I'll try to," responded she meekly.

"Then let us never refer to it again."

The shadow in his eyes was fading but there was still a strain of irritation in his voice.

"Very well. We won't," agreed Penelope promptly.

He gave a sigh of relief.

"Thank you!" said he.

"But it is not only the book and — and — and being here," she faltered presently. "I must be getting back to Belleport soon. I have had no letters from my family for over a week and am a little worried. Grandfather always writes."

"I have sent a boy over to Pinckney Street every day to call for your mail," announced Gordon, "but he has brought back nothing. For many reasons it seemed wiser not to leave your present address with your landlady. She might not," he stopped for a word — "understand," concluded he ambiguously. "People are so inquisitive sometimes and have so little intelligence."

The latter portion of the sentence slipped past Penelope but she caught at the former clause.

"How thoughtful of you to send every day for my letters!" she exclaimed.

"I thought you ought to have them if there were any," Hamilton remarked. "It is never well to be entirely cut off from one's home. Something important might happen there."

She nodded.

"Pardon my seeming curiosity, but have you written to Belleport since you've been ill?"

"No, I'm ashamed to confess, I haven't," the girl owned with contrition. "You see, I felt so miserable I simply couldn't write myself, and I knew if any one were to write for me it would frighten them to death and bring Aunt Martha, Aunt Elizabeth and Grandfather all flying to Boston. It was not as if I had been in any danger. I was not really very sick."

Hamilton did not enlighten her.

"I knew I should be all right before long and so I let it go. But I will write now."

"Shall you tell them —"

"That I have been sick, you mean? No. Why distress them when it is over and done with?"

"Why, indeed?"

"If my Grandfather so much as suspected I had not been well," went on Penelope swiftly, "I do believe he would pack up his traps and come to Boston, although he has not made the journey in twenty years. He wouldn't rest until he saw with his own eyes that I was all right. You don't know what a dear he is," she concluded, a tender reminiscent light in her eyes.

Hamilton, studying her, smiled.

"I haven't a doubt of it," he declared. "But about writing them and all that?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why — eh — since you are to remain here, it seems

foolish for you to retain your Pinckney Street room. Why not let me send for your trunk and give up your lodgings?"

"Why — but —"

"The room is only an unnecessary expense."

"But — but —" Again she saw the shade of annoyance wrinkle his forehead and hastily took warning. "But what should I tell them at home?"

"Why tell them anything?"

"But my mail?"

"I can continue to send to Pinckney Street for it. Our boys are always going on errands. Or you can give the postoffice orders to forward it here."

"That would be the best way."

"Then your landlady needn't know anything about where you have gone. It may save gossip. Should she take a whim to inquire into your whereabouts it might be annoying."

Penelope paused, unconvinced.

"It seems to me the less she is mixed up in your affairs the better. For all she will know, you have gone home to Belleport," explained Hamilton.

"Yes, perhaps it is better," the girl at last agreed.

"Of course, there is nothing but what she is perfectly welcome to know," Gordon went on. "Still, I don't think you are bound to confide all your concerns to her."

All her concerns! Certainly Penelope did not wish to do that — not under the present circumstances. It had long been her constant fear that the prying Mrs. Hayward would find out more than she chose to have her.

"I guess you're right, Mr. Hamilton," she conceded.

"It seems so to me. We'll keep your whereabouts secret, then," the man rejoined with evident relief. "That will leave you free to work here in peace without interruptions. You can put things through in half the

time if you are let alone. A writer cannot mix up work and play. It is impossible."

"There is no danger of my doing any playing," Penelope asserted, with a faint smile. "You see I know nobody in Boston to play with."

"So much the better," Gordon responded immediately. "When you need recreation I'll see that you have it."

"Dinner is served, sir," announced Roberts, appearing at the door.

"Shall we go in?" asked Hamilton, rising and looking down at her.

Seating her at the other side of the gleaming mahogany, he took up his napkin. It was long since he had been tête-à-tête with a woman at his own table. There had been small dinners and bachelor suppers but never since the death of his mother had a solitary woman's face confronted him from across the disc of polished wood. How fair the girl looked — and how young! And how she became her surroundings! The stately old interior seemed to borrow something of her youth and to be suddenly touched with a spirit of festivity that caused the plate shining on the long sideboard to flash brighter, the candles to glow more radiantly and every sparkling object to catch and hold the light with unwonted brilliance; even Roberts, conscious of a new element in the atmosphere, moved with more elastic step and presented the viands he served with a rejuvenated graciousness.

The logs burning in the big fireplace shot up into flame sending dancing flickers of warmth across the portraits of the Hamiltons ranged upon the wall. The man at the table met their eyes without flinching. He had no cause to apologize to his ancestors either for Penelope's presence there or for her bearing. Even critical old Grandfather Hamilton, who in his day had been quite a connoisseur of women, could have found scant reason for

complaint against the guest who occupied the seat of honor beneath his picture. She might, perhaps, have been more perfect of feature but she was every inch a lady; and if she were shy her demureness, far from ranking as a defect, possessed a naïveté quite as its own,—at least, it did for old Hamilton's grandson.

As the meal progressed it was continually in Gordon's thought how much pleasanter was this dinner than the long and dreary ones through which he was habitually dragged. The Hamiltons' retainers, trained to conventional standards, would as soon have omitted their prayers in the morning as the soup, salad, or coffee at night. Hence, evening after evening, with unwavering regularity, Roberts dispensed from the same massive Sheffield and Willow ware the same sequence of faultlessly prepared courses that the Hamilton traditions demanded, serving each as if he were administering a rite of the church. It was no occasion for flippancy or levity. Mr. Gordon might be friendly at other times but at dinner he was the master of the house, the last of the Hamiltons, and as such he was expected to comport himself in silence and with the decorum befitting his station.

Thus far he had played his rôle to the entire satisfaction of his dependents. But the events of the past week had created in them an uneasiness as to his future docility. Was he going to branch out now, at his age, and adopt the casual independence of the up-coming generation? Fervently they prayed not. If there were no other objection to unconventionality than its unexpectedness that would have been enough to condemn it in their eyes. They were too old to be shaken out of their ruts and follow after other gods. And anyway it was not dignified for a Hamilton to defy custom and set at naught the traditions of the past.

This woman the master had so abruptly brought home!

This *sick woman!* The thing was entirely at variance with the code of the manor. Perhaps it was an emergency. At any rate they had all gone through with it as cheerfully as they could in that hope. But if Mr. Gordon were to establish the habit of picking up stray persons and conveying them home unannounced, possibly it might be as well to remind him politely that it never had been done. In fact, he must already be as well aware of that as they. Nevertheless, if he were, he betrayed in the present instance no sign of guilt at his transgression; and had a spectator glanced into the dining room he would not have had the faintest suspicion that the couple who dallied in the candle light over their coffee were other than an ordinary sedate Beacon Street couple who sat there night after night in the same decorous fashion. The lady daintily fingered her shell-like cup of old Sèvres and chatted and laughed, and the man lighting a cigarette watched her through its haze with the grave satisfaction of one entirely content.

The talk was of books and authors, a very proper and natural subject in Roberts' opinion, and one he had so often heard discussed that had he been invited to join in the conversation he could have done so with an intelligence that might have amazed his hearers. He had the true Boston veneration for things of the mind. Was not lineage half of life and intellect the other? No, he had no fault to find with the topic introduced. It was perfectly Hamiltonian and quite up to the established standards of the house. Nor could one quarrel in any way with the deportment of Miss Turner, who, although he had been unable to discover her name either in the Blue Book or the Social Register, he was bound to admit must be well born, and handled her fork, napkin and finger-bowl quite as a lady should. Even when she rose from the table she did it with a grace that would have

done honor to the mistress herself. From beginning to end there appeared to be nothing out of the ordinary in the drama before him; and yet he knew that the occasion was not the humdrum thing it seemed and that it held the element of the unusual. Beneath the tranquil exterior lay something he did not understand.

The week of Penelope's stay lengthened into ten days, then into a fortnight; and presently its third week began. She was quite at home now in the old mansion and although the servants maintained their reservations concerning her, waiting upon her with studied courtesy, there was not one of them who did not find his constraint to be crumbling beneath the spell of her unassuming good will. Much of the day she spent writing at Hamilton's great desk in the library where he always joined her directly dinner was finished. From the hall one could catch the murmur of their voices, and not infrequently overhear fragments of spirited argument concerning some book or story they appeared to be reading together.

"I do not agree with you," came the woman's voice. "No man could be with a girl constantly without her knowing that he loved her."

"I differ from you," Hamilton returned with a note of protest in his voice. "A fellow of any will power is capable of putting a tremendous check on himself when he must. I know—I believe," he amended hurriedly, "that a man could be with a woman every day and love her without her suspecting it."

A rippling laugh came from his antagonist.

"She must be a very stupid creature then. Well, have your own way. We'll let Jean remain in entire ignorance that Hilforth loves her. It will make the story more exciting."

"Perhaps so—for the girl," growled Hamilton.

"For the reader, too," Penelope declared promptly.

Of course, it was only make-believe people whom they discussed, but nevertheless the debaters seemed to Roberts to be uncommonly in earnest about it. Evening after evening the psychological dialogues went on. Sometimes during the day the chauffeur took Miss Turner out to do errands, or for a drive, but more often she remained at work until late afternoon when Hamilton returned promptly from the office and they motored off together, or took a walk on the Avenue or Embankment.

In the meantime shopping had resulted in an augmented wardrobe for Miss Turner, and a chic suit of brown, with a smart little toque that matched it, had superseded the shabby garments in which she had made her initial appearance. She also now wore at dinner a gown of soft green that wrought an astonishing change in her ensemble. These newer possessions the old butler was unable to reconcile with a small and antiquated trunk that had recently arrived, and a carpet-covered satchel which in itself demanded the respect of one trained to regard the antique not only with appreciation but with a certain measure of awe.

Evidently she had no friends in the city for no one called to see her; neither did she receive any letters, a rather puzzling condition of affairs, one must admit, and one that he owned he did not altogether like the looks of. Still, as he rubbed his chin, he granted that a score of reasons might account for the circumstance, odd as it was.

It certainly was apparent that whatever her status Mr. Hamilton held Miss Turner to be a person of importance and treated her with the greatest respect and from him the others took their cue, serving the mysterious little lady as if she were a visiting princess. Just when the embers of curiosity concerning her were beginning to die down and smolder what must the master do but rake them all

into a blaze again by returning from the office one day in company with a stenographer, after which time this young woman augmented the family circle, coming daily and waking the stillness with the incessant click of a typewriter that could be heard from morning until late afternoon.

Roberts shook his head.

"I don't fathom it at all," observed he despairingly to Catherine.

"Nor I, Roberts," was her reply. "It is very peculiar, and if I may express my opinion, very unsuitable. There never was a typewriter in this house; and the library was never before turned upside down with a clutter of papers. If it is business, all I can say is it belongs downtown; and if it isn't business, what is it?"

CHAPTER XXII

MORE WEBS

ON a Sunday afternoon toward the first of June Dick Morton rang the bell of the Wilmot mansion and was forthwith ushered into the living room. It was evident he had been expected for scarce a moment had elapsed before Margaret came tripping down the stairs.

"I hope I'm not late," she said a trifle flurried.

"Not a second," returned the man, taking her hand. "And even if you were it would make no difference." He paused looking eagerly at her from head to foot and observing with pleasure the youthful lines of the trim blue suit and the fetching little toque she wore. "I like your hat," he commented with the intimacy of the privileged.

"Do you? How nice!" laughed she. "Even now I hardly know myself in city clothes. I have worn a Red Cross uniform until I feel odd and conspicuous in anything else."

"I did not think I could ever like you as well in another dress as in that uniform," went on the man. "But I do."

He saw her flush.

"Clothes do change us, don't they?" she answered at random.

"Nothing can ever really change you," replied the young soldier with emphasis.

"Dick — please!" implored the girl. "You promised you wouldn't."

"I know. Forgive me. But it is so infernally hard always to remember."

She looked away, toying with the button of her glove; then said in a strained voice, "Sometimes I question whether we're doing right to go on this way. Whether it's fair."

"For me to come here you mean? Good God!" he burst out. "You wouldn't take everything away, would you?"

"But I am not certain that it does any good. I can't see that it makes you either any happier or any more reasonable."

"Yes, it does!"

"Besides, there's Archie."

"What do I take from him that is his?" was the fierce demand.

"Nothing, Dick — nothing. How could you?" She strove to steady the catch in her voice. "Let us talk no more about it."

"But you are annoyed with me."

"No, I'm not. Indeed, I'm not! See! Just to prove it I am going to wear the violets you sent even if you did transgress orders by buying them. Aren't they beautiful?" She took the flowers from a bowl of Tiffany glass, shook the water from their stems, and fastened them in her coat.

"Do you remember the violets we picked that day near Neuilly, Margaret?"

Watching her, he saw her face soften.

"Remember? Yes. What a day it was!"

"A dream day, Peggy!" he whispered.

For a moment she mused; then broke the silence with forced gayety:

"Come! We must go or we shall be late for the pictures," exclaimed she.

He followed her into the shaded street through whose vista of elms the waters of the river flashed in their brimming basin.

"Suppose we walk up Beacon Street. Shall we? It is not far and the day is so lovely."

"Any way you say," smiled Morton contentedly.

"I like to go through Beacon Street," she explained, turning the corner at the foot of the hill and starting along the broad asphalt, "because of the fine old houses and pretty grass plots. See these jonquils! Father's friend, Mr. Hamilton, whom you met at our house at dinner a while ago, lives on this street. The house with the colonial doorway is his."

"Where the girl is standing?"

"Y — e — s ——— no, it can't be. Perhaps it is farther along." She caught her breath and a murmur of surprise escaped her. "Yes, that is the house, after all, and there is Gordon now. Who can the girl be?"

"Some relative, probably," was Morton's careless reply. What interest had he in Hamilton or the girl either except to pray they did not interrupt his tête-à-tête with Peggy?

"But Mr. Hamilton keeps bachelor's hall and has no relatives," insisted Margaret, walking on. For an interval she seemed lost in thought.

"I cannot imagine who that girl can be," she presently reiterated.

"Perhaps we shall overtake them and then you will have a chance to find out," retorted Dick, a hint of sharpness in the words.

"Oh, don't let's overtake them of all things!" she protested.

A short laugh came from young Morton but she did not heed it; her attention was centered so completely on the couple who loitered upon the Hamilton doorstep that it

is doubtful whether she so much as heard the triumphant rejoinder. Even while she watched, Gordon's limousine rounded the corner and she saw him help his companion into the waiting vehicle, after which they rolled away.

"You have missed your opportunity to identify the mysterious lady," Dick announced.

"Apparently I have," answered she slowly, trying to meet his banter with a smile. "Not that I really care. Nevertheless, knowing Gordon as well as I do, I cannot but wonder who she is. It is strange for a woman to be coming out of the house."

"Oh, I don't know," was Dick's indifferent answer. "Lots of things look strange that prove on investigation to be quite simple."

"But a girl at the Hamiltons' is strange," persisted Margaret, stung into irritation by the note of lightness in his tone, "and you would think so too if you knew more about it."

The words had not left her tongue, however, before penitence for her anger overwhelmed her and during the remainder of the walk she sought to make amends by being more than ordinarily gay and entertaining; but beneath her gayety an undercurrent of speculation lingered, marring the whole-heartedness of her mood and causing Morton, ever jealous of her attention, to attach more importance to the incident than he might otherwise have done.

Could it be possible she cared for Hamilton and resented his interest in another woman? Or did she for the first time suspect this friend of hers of being other than she had thought him, and had the discovery brought with it a shock? Dick would have given much to know. That a strong friendship existed between the Hamiltons and the Wilmots he was well aware; but that anything more than friendliness lay concealed behind it had never

entered his mind. And yet Hamilton was an indisputably attractive man whose intimacy in the Wilmot home gave him such great advantages that such a thing was not beyond the reach of the imagination.

Dick turned and from quite a new angle began furtively to study the girl at his side. Although she laughed and chattered merrily, he knew her too well not to realize she was making random conversation, and that while she made it her mind was otherwise occupied. Inwardly he cursed Hamilton.

What a three-cornered game it would be if all this time that she was engaged to Archie Lambeth, she was in love with Hamilton, and was meantime toying with still another man. No! It wasn't like her — she who was the personification of truth and sincerity. At least, he admitted instantly, she was not to blame for her relation to himself. If he had hypercritically misnamed the bond existing between them, calling it friendship when he well knew it was something widely different, she was not responsible for that. In the choice between labeling it falsely or losing her altogether he had chosen the lesser evil and might not Hamilton have adopted his own policy and be masquerading in much the same fashion?

By the time they reached the Art Club Dick had woven about the incident of the afternoon a network of suspicion from which he found himself unable to escape; and it was with a sensation closely akin to rage that he entered the gallery only to confront the man and woman who were the cause of his disquietude. They were standing at the farther end of the room before a large canvas of a ship under full sail, and the familiar lines of the girl's head and shoulders arrested and instantly held his attention. Her face, turned toward the picture before her with entire absorption, he could not see, and even when Hamilton bent and spoke to her she appeared to be un-

conscious of his nearness. For the space of a few seconds she stood lost in admiration; then suddenly the tenacity of her interest relaxed, and as she turned he beheld the countenance of Penelope Turner.

Was ever discovery more astounding!

Penelope, of all people! And yet it was Penelope; there was no disputing that. Nevertheless, it was such a different Penelope from the defiant, outraged creature he had left in Belleport that he gazed at her as if doubting the evidence of his own senses. From her pert little hat to the tip of her trim patent leather shoe she was quite another person; nor did the cluster of orchids tucked into her coat do more than accentuate her strangeness. What had happened to work such a transformation? Then his eyes traveled to Hamilton and a rush of blood mounted to his forehead. Was this the explanation? He longed to seize the man by the throat and confront him with the query.

Where could the two have met? And what had placed a girl of Penelope's background and a person of Hamilton's on terms of such intimacy? Fruitlessly he twisted and turned the evidence, seeking a solution of the mystery until an exclamation from Margaret brought him to himself. In the shock of the encounter he had entirely forgotten Peggy and when he now turned it was to find her staring at the couple at the farther end of the room with a consternation quite equal to his own. And as if their scrutiny wrought a psychic charm at the same moment Gordon wheeled about, started, smiled and came striding toward them across the crowded gallery.

"So you were inspired to come to the show, too," said he, bending low over Margaret's hand and nodding a welcome to Morton. "It is great, isn't it—only too much of a crush. Why they send out so many cards to these private views beats me. It is no compliment to

invite people to an exhibition so crowded that one can scarcely see a thing." The phrases came rapidly and Margaret thought she detected nervousness in his manner.

"It is a jam," she agreed. "As for the pictures — we have only just arrived and have not seen them yet. Are they good?"

"More interesting than usual, it seems to me," was the enthusiastic reply. "Brandon is evidently painting in quite a different style and so is Colchester, broader and more significant; then there are some new men whose work is original. That marine on the opposite wall is one of the best pictures here. Come over and see it." Then addressing Morton he added, "If about half these people would clear out we could get a better view of it."

The remark demanded no response and Dick offered none.

"I have a friend with me whom I want you to meet," went on the speaker swiftly, turning to Margaret. "Will you come?"

She inclined her head in assent and without waiting for more Gordon began to elbow a passageway through the throng.

Penelope was standing in the same intent pose in which her escort had left her and so rapt was her interest that at the moment the approach of strangers seemed almost an intrusion; nevertheless at Hamilton's voice the seriousness of her gaze vanished and with quiet attention she faced him.

"I wish you to meet some acquaintances of mine, Miss Turner," he said. "This is Miss Wilmot, a very old and dear friend; and this is Mr. Morton."

They saw her start with a little, sharp intake of breath; then with instant control she answered gravely:

"I am very glad to meet you, Miss Wilmot; to know an old friend of Mr. Hamilton's is indeed a pleasure.

Mr. Morton I know already." Carelessly she extended her hand. "How are you, Dick? This ship is marvelous, isn't it — quite like home?"

The young Cape Codder gasped at the audacity of her indifference. Why, she had loved him once — or had testified she did. Under the circumstances one would have imagined an encounter as unexpected as the present would at least have stirred her to a blush. But if she were surprised she certainly carried it off valiantly and the discomfited lover found himself regarding her with involuntary admiration.

"I heard you were in Boston," he contrived to stammer.

"Yes, I have been here since early spring," was the response. "I am, however, going home very soon now. And how do you like being in the city, Dick?"

Again her perfect ease of manner disconcerted him.

"Immensely!" The time was short and curiosity urged him on. "Where are you stopping?"

"Oh, with friends," came airily from Penelope. Then with a pretty gesture of graciousness she turned toward Margaret, explaining with winning friendliness, "Mr. Morton and I used to know each other at Belleport. Were you ever on the Cape, Miss Wilmot?"

It was charmingly done and only a brute could have resisted the appeal of her glance. Margaret Wilmot answered smile with smile.

"No, I am sorry to say I have never visited the Cape," she returned.

"That is a pity. You really should come there sometime. We think it is very beautiful."

"Cape Cod is one of the very loveliest corners of God's earth," put in Hamilton eagerly. "If you need any one to endorse its glories let me add my testimony."

"Oh, you did use to spend your vacations there, didn't

you, Gordon?" Margaret remarked, as if recalling a forgotten circumstance.

"I spend them there now, dear lady, whenever I can."

The discovery evidently aroused in Peggy a train of puzzling thought of which Gordon was unconscious, for she scarcely listened when he reiterated:

"Yes, there is no place on earth quite like the Cape."

Her mind was busy mentally reconstructing those weeks of implied idleness and leaping forward to a possible romance 'twixt Hamilton and the recently discovered Miss Turner. They had, then, been summer acquaintances and the bond had strengthened until the girl had either followed Gordon to the city of her own free will or he had coaxed her hither by his persuasions. In any case here she was and of the incident he had never breathed a word. In the face of their friendship it hurt, — it could not but hurt. What more natural than sometime, when alone together, he should have alluded to this girl — unless, indeed, he had a reason of his own for concealing the connection?

And while Margaret Wilmot pondered thus, nursing her rising reproach and resentment, Dick Morton, with a masculine knowledge of the world, was going to even greater lengths in condemning the man before him. Hamilton then had known Penelope in her home; seen how unsophisticated and inexperienced she was; played upon her feelings; and lured her to Boston. Nay, he had even ventured farther and actually taken her to his own residence; at least it appeared so. And in all innocence Penelope had trusted and believed in him and accepted his attentions. It was monstrous!

Furthermore, unabashed by the blackness of his deed Hamilton had the effrontery to flaunt the victim of his deception before the public and jauntily present her to a woman of Margaret Wilmot's standards. One would

have thought that either conscience or decency would at least have deterred him from adding this flagrant insult to the other crimes of which he was guilty.

Well, the affair should go no farther — he would see to that. Penelope's family should be fully informed as to her whereabouts (for that they were ignorant of the peril in which she stood he did not doubt); and once the Old Captain was on the scent nobody else would be needed to track down Mr. Gordon Hamilton and bring him to justice. Captain Jabez adored his granddaughter and he could be trusted to deal without leniency toward any man who sought to do her evil.

The girl herself he did not blame. She was young, ill-versed in the wiles of the world, and only too easy prey for the designing and malicious.

But this knave of a Hamilton was a responsible person who knew better than any one could tell him the precise direction toward which his acts were tending, and not another sun should go down before his perfidy should be exposed and Penelope's relatives be informed of her danger. Yes, he would go to Belleport to-morrow and at the risk of being rated as a meddler or a jealous lover he would acquaint the Allens with the miserable facts.

He only prayed that his warning might not come too late.

CHAPTER XXIII

CAPTAIN JABEZ'S PLANS GO AWRY

ON an afternoon in June Captain Jabez Allen sat meditating in solitary silence on his doorstep.

Before him a sparkling strand, iridescent to the sand's moist rim, stretched away until it melted into the fickle flood of the tide. It was a day when a fresh breeze, rioting with the crowding waves, edged each with a curl of foam and tossed into a swirling sea of emerald the coarse salt grass that covered the dunes and flat reaches of shore. Above the unresting pulse of the ocean sounded the flapping of great wings and the shrill cries of gulls as they battled, snowy-breasted, against the gale.

But the Old Captain, immovable on the doorstep, cast not a glance toward the panorama of beauty confronting him. So intense was his reverie that a host and all its chariots might have approached and he been unconscious of their coming. There, alone on the steps, Captain Jabez was experiencing a bitterness of soul such as he had never before known. Until now there had never been a time in all his life when he had not been able to hold his head proudly aloft and squarely meet the gaze of his fellows. But to-day his glance drooped even before the clear eye of the day. To be sure he was up to the present his own accuser and his guilt was known only to himself, but that fact made the consciousness of it none the less poignant. Besides, a moment would come — nay, it was even now on the way — when all Belleport

would be acquainted with what he had done and scorn him for it. It was unavoidable.

Well, he deserved the blame that would be heaped on him. He had committed a crime and it was only right that he should suffer for it. And yet he had not sinned deliberately. His motive had been good when, influenced by weakness and affection, he had been led to take his first downward step. He had fully expected to be able to right everything within a few days at most. It was only the tiding over of an emergency.

Penelope had been so wretchedly unhappy, poor child, and had taken so little interest in life that he had welcomed her eager request to be allowed to go to the city. Of course, it was a foolish, girlish dream, this writing scheme of hers. He doubted seriously whether anybody, even the cleverest authors, made fortunes out of books. Certainly for a person as young and inexperienced as Penelope the chance of success was so slight as to be negligible. It was the way of youth to follow the rainbow. Age was wiser. Nevertheless, he had not had the heart to dash into gloom the glory of the beckoning vision. It had been long since a gleam of hope had lighted the eyes of Penelope. A winter away from home and from the monotony of Belleport might not be such a bad thing, after all.

She had been the victim of a sad and humiliating experience which had not only disappointed her hopes but almost exterminated her courage to go on with life at all. Gossip had made her its target, bandying her name about until who could wonder that a girl so proud as she should wrench rebelliously at her fetters and long to get away into an environment where nobody knew her and where she might make a fresh start? The request was far from unreasonable.

And so he had overruled the protests and sinister warn-

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ings of Elizabeth and Martha, and taking the responsibility upon his own shoulders, had sent Penelope off to enjoy her roseate dream of freedom. He had expected the indulgence of such a plan might make inroads on his slender bank account; but how great the drain would prove to be he was ignorant, and it was not until the child was finally ensconced in surroundings that seemed as modest as decency would permit that the knowledge came to him how appallingly large was the stipend demanded to maintain her even in this simple fashion. How was it possible for the cost of living in the city to mount to such a figure? He gasped at the contrast between prices in Belleport and in Boston. Why, the money seemed fairly to melt away!

And yet the girl was not extravagant; he was willing to stake his oath on that. Of course, it was not to be expected that any young person who had never handled money would count the pennies as an elder one would. Had the sum been sent him to expend, undoubtedly he could have done better with it. But then seventy years of living had rolled over his head and taught him many lessons in finance.

As time went on and his earnings disappeared like quicksands into an abyss, he asked himself whether he ought not to send for Penelope to come home. Could he afford to indulge her in such a luxury as a winter in the city? Was it right that he should? The psychological effects of these questionings were astonishing for never did he give way to them but a letter came from Boston filled with girlish joy and enthusiasm and the assurance that ultimate success was sure to crown her efforts. How content she seemed! Only a brute would have had the heart to put an end to her happiness. Hence he had temporized, reasoning that if all his little fund in the bank became exhausted, there was still in re-

serve a note of Rufus Hurd's that would soon fall due, which money would carry him across the shoals he was skimming and land him in deep water. Surely Penelope would be home by July. Who but a crystal gazer, astrologer, or mind-reader — and probably not even they — could have foreseen that Rufus, like himself, would become involved amid a tangle of misfortunes, and while shingling his barn fall from the ridgepole and injure his spine so that an operation offered the only hope for saving his life? If he lived — and that seemed doubtful — there would be doctors' bills and nurses' and in the meantime poor Ruffie, who was one of Captain Jabez's oldest friends, lay fretting and wondering how he was to meet the payment that was fast coming due.

One would have lacked a spark of humanity not to say, as did the Old Captain, "Never mind about the note just now, Ruffie. Let it run until you ain't a-founderin' in such mighty seas. It won't make no difference."

It was a noble falsehood but it was worth it to see the gleam of relief that flashed up in the sick man's eyes. Captain Jabez, who was not habitually merciful when it came to business matters, felt a tingle of satisfaction pass over him at the sight of Ruffie's face.

Nevertheless the pleasure of performing this altruistic deed did not aid him in his present dilemma. Where was he to turn for money to defray Penelope's city expenses now? To be sure, both Elizabeth and Martha had small bank accounts but as they had bitterly opposed the plan of the girl's going to Boston and had termed it nonsensical extravagance, he was too proud to borrow from either of them.

Then suddenly one night, as he lay tossing sleeplessly on his pillow, and facing the grim fact that no alternative remained but to summon his granddaughter prematurely back to Belleport, a way of escape from his diffi-

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culties suddenly presented itself. It seemed so simple he wondered it had not occurred to him before. The church funds! They were in his care and lying unused in the county savings bank. If he borrowed them and paid interest on the loan certainly there could be no dishonesty in that; and by and by, when Rufus Hurd got on his feet again and met his obligation, Captain Jabez would slip the church money back into the institution from which he had drawn it and nobody would be the wiser. Only once a year did the society concern itself about the nest-egg and that was when at the annual meeting he read a brief and stilted report of the finances and the congregation listened to it in bored silence. It was always the same — a short, dry record of the three hundred dollars that Ebed Tapley had bequeathed to the organization years before. It had never been invested and there it lay, a glory to the Methodist denomination and a weapon to brandish in the faces of their insolvent Congregational brethren.

No, certainly no one would know or care if in his dire straits he used the money for this worthy purpose. If the winter gave back to Penelope her former hope and buoyancy the sum would be well spent, and if the worst befell and it did not, at least he had tried the remedy and convinced himself of its uselessness. In the meantime there remained the chance — a wild and improbable chance, he granted — but nevertheless the chance that perhaps she might make good and pay back at least a part of what it had cost him.

Reasoning thus, Captain Jabez waited for the dawn and when morning was come and he had had his breakfast he harnessed up his mare and gritted his way over the sandy roads that wove in and out among the pines and fragrant bayberry to Sawyer's Falls where the county bank was.

"Lord on high! You ain't a-goin' to disturb that account now, are you?" commented Eli Drake, the astounded cashier, when Captain Jabez had imparted to him his errand.

"Yes, I be," smiled the Old Captain firmly. "I'll leave you fifty dollars, though, to remember me by."

"But whatever are you goin' to do with two hundred and fifty dollars?"

Captain Jabez coughed.

"I've a use for it," he answered good-humoredly.

"Investin' it somewheres else, eh?"

"U — m, yes."

"Better rate of interest?"

The Old Captain nodded.

"Wal, I don't know's we can blame you fur that," drawled Eli. "Still, we don't like havin' great chunks of money hauled out of here. I grant, though, that these are times when every penny counts, an' I ain't sayin' a man shouldn't do the best he can for himself. How'll you take it, Jabez?"

"Hashed up small if convenient. 'Twill be easier to spend." He grinned in sickly fashion.

"I reckon tens would be the most handy then," asserted Eli. "Mighty lucky I have 'em, too. 'Tain't always we could deliver over such a sum without knowin' of it beforehand. But fortunately I've got enough in the safe to-day to fit you out in great shape."

He shuffled across the room to the receptacle in question and throwing open its iron door took from it a roll of bills which he proceeded to count off between a grimy thumb and forefinger.

"It's a long time since we've made a big payment like this," announced he, loth to deliver the little fortune. "I don't believe we've done it in several years. The last *time* was when Lyman Bearse over Wilton way yanked

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out every penny of his cash to buy that automobile of his; and then the darn thing blew up the next week 'fore he'd got any good out of it. You warn't calcalatin' to buy an automobile, was you, Jabez?"

"You bet I warn't!"

"An' that's where you're wise, too," Mr. Hurd declared, with a sage shake of his head. "They're treacherous, noisy, smellin' things! Likely you've got your eye on a mortgage."

The Captain made no reply.

"Well, a first mortgage ain't so bad," went on the cashier. "We've just put one on the Snow house, young Sam's place. To judge by the soundin's that wife he's married ain't proved much of an investment. Poor Sam! He's made a nice mess of his finances, I'm afraid. He's a funny feller. One night he was joshin' Lemuel Daggert 'cause whenever Lem passed the house after dusk he had a lantern with him.

"'So you're goin' courtin' Sophie Howe, are you, Lem?' sez Sam. 'What on earth do you carry a lantern for? I never felt no call to carry a lantern when I went a-courtin'.'"

"'Nope,' answers Lem, quicker'n a flash. 'You didn't — *an' look what you got.*'"

"Ha, ha, that was a good one, an' no mistake. Yes, we've took a mortgage on Sam's property. Whenever we can get reliable ones we snap 'em up like chain-lightnin'. We figger there ain't nothin' better. Of course, if you've got a-holt of a good security like that I ain't a-goin' to discourage you; but if you ain't you much better leave the money here. We pay as high interest on your capital as it will fetch you anywheres else."

Again Captain Jabez did not answer but the gesture with which he held out his palm for the bills was eloquent with decision.

"You're set on havin' the money, are you? No changin' your mind?"

"I reckon not, Eli."

"Then take it in the Lord's name," murmured Eli Hurd. "If you lose it an' wish later on 'twas back here safe an' sound, don't blame me."

"I ain't countin' on losin' it, Eli. I've lived seventy odd years," was the dry retort.

"Men older'n you be have been known to lose money," returned Hurd.

"There's no vaccinating against idiocy like there is against smallpox," called Captain Jabez over his shoulder.

But Eli Hurd did not reply. Already he was busy locking his cash box up in the safe and making an entry of the mammoth transaction on his ledger. His lower lip was drawn in and his tusklike teeth set rigidly upon it as if the magnitude of the deal he had just pulled off had upset him to no small extent.

Therefore without further comment the Old Captain went out, clambered into his wagon, and drove off down the State Road. A weight had been removed from his mind and he even ventured to hum in a semi-conscious, rumbling voice the opening bars of "Jerusalem the Golden", his favorite hymn. Once at home he sent off to Penelope a check to meet her monthly expenses and thereafter at regular intervals he proceeded to dole out to her an allowance that not only seemed to him ample but magnificent. The first hundred dollars melted away in no time, and the second dwindled with like rapidity; and still the girl made no mention of her work being finished or set a date for her return home. Anxiously Captain Jabez began on the last fifty dollars of his little fortune; and it was at this juncture that a *terrible* blow descended upon him; bringing him face

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to face with the pitiless reality of what he had done.

For some time past, although no consciousness of guilt actually discomfited him, he had not felt the desire to mingle at gatherings of the church any more than was necessary. Questions might be asked, he argued, and awkward situations arise. It was as well to remain at home. Therefore when the evening for the meeting of the standing committee of the organization arrived, he pleaded rheumatism and did not go. Such meetings seldom amounted to more than voting to restore a broken window catch or purchase another gallon of kerosene for the lamps lighting the vestry. But unfortunately for Captain Jabez this particular meeting did not prove to be so uneventful as the majority of its predecessors had been.

Mr. Richard Galbraith, a resident of New York who came to the Cape summers, swept the community off its feet by writing and offering to redecorate the interior of the church and put in stained-glass windows if the society would paint the outside of the edifice. The Methodists caught at the bargain with avidity. It was wonderful, unbelievable, too good to be true. The chairman of the committee read and reread the communication aloud to make sure beyond all dispute that there was no mistake about it. Yes, there were the terms in black and white; and if Mr. Galbraith made them they knew he would fulfill them to the letter, for he was that sort. Instantly the same question leaped to the lips of every person present. How could the Tapley bequest be better expended than to meet this alluring suggestion? The money in the bank would just about cover the expenses of such an enterprise, and when it was spent it would not only have gone to freshen up and preserve the exterior of the edifice but in reality fit the whole building out with

a sumptuousness that never could have been afforded otherwise. Galbraith was rich and he never did things by halves.

Hence at the recommendation of the committee the matter was placed before the church members and it was unanimously voted to get a painter and start the work immediately that it might be finished before summer. At the same time a note of grateful acceptance was dispatched to Mr. Richard Galbraith at his New York residence.

With such speed was the affair dispatched that Captain Jabez, nursing his rheumatism at home and watched over by his two anxious daughters, had no knowledge of the epoch-making event until Elisha Baker came ambling into the yard the next morning to inquire for his health and impart the astonishing tidings.

"Wal, wal, Jabez! We missed you last night at meetin'," began he, seating himself in the high-backed kitchen rocker.

"I warn't up to comin', Lish."

"'Twas a pity. Such doin's was never heard of. We've voted to paint the church! What do you say to that?"

"Wal, I'll say it needs it bad enough," came dryly from the Old Captain.

"That's right. So it does. The shingles are fairly rottin' for a coat of paint."

"Yes, seems to me it's got to where it's a question of preservin' the buildin' an' no mistake. But 'twill cost money. How was the parish calcalatin' to raise the funds. I s'pose likely the women are plannin' to sponge it out of the summer boarders with a fair or somethin'."

This was the method commonly employed when financial tides rose and engulfed the denizens of the town.

"The women? Nothin'! 'Tain't the women that's

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goin' to do it this time — at least not directly. It's a man!"

"Bless my soul! You don't say so!" Captain Jabez's jaw dropped with amazement. "An' who is that philanthropic?"

"Ebed Tapley."

"But — but — Ebed's dead!" gasped Captain Jabez.

"Course he's dead. But ain't there a sayin' in the Bible somewheres that the works of a good man shall follow him?"

"What you gettin' at, Lish?"

"We're goin' to take Ebed's money," announced Elisha. "We voted last night to do it — appropriated three hundred dollars to paint the whole durn thing from weathervane to cellar, two good coats of the best paint to be got."

Beneath the tan that seventy continuous years of salt and sunshine had burnt deeper and deeper into the Old Captain's skin he paled.

"When you goin' to do it?"

"Now — right away! Bearse is goin' to Hyannis tomorrow to hunt up some men an' within a month we calculate the deed will be done. In the meantime Galbraith, the feller who bought that place out on the Point, you know, is goin' to get busy on the inside. There'll be somethin' doin' then, you bet yer. Folks say he's sendin' down some people from his home town to look over the place. Ain't goin' to let none of the village folks handle the job, it appears. I'm kinder sorry, 'cause it's goin' to stir up feelin'. Still it can't be helped an' beggars can't be choosers. Most likely this Tiffany chap who's comin' is Galbraith's regular painter an' knowin' him he'll most likely do it cheaper. Galbraith has prob'ly had some experience here an' it's soured him on havin' our men; there's no denyin' we do tuck it onto strangers.

Sometimes I think it's kinder a mistake to go in strong's we do. Mebbe Galbraith's sorter up on his ear with bein' soaked, an' has decided to cut out Belleport people an' try these Tiffany folks that he knows about. You can't really blame him. You'd do it yourself, I'll bet. I know I would. Anyhow, it ain't good taste for us to grumble. You can't look a gift horse in the mouth."

Having delivered himself of this philosophy, which Captain Jabez granted to be quite logical, Elisha inquired further about the Old Captain's rheumatism, exchanged a few bits of sparkling gossip with Martha and Elizabeth, and took his departure.

Captain Jabez watched him go but did not rise to accompany him to the door. He felt too weak and sick. He was ruined — a ruined man! And not only ruined but disgraced! The bill for the painting of the church would come and he would not be able to meet it, and then everybody would be asking where the money left in his charge had gone. Not the slightest hope of replacing it before it was needed existed. Rufus Hurd was still too ill to be appealed to and was not in a position to raise the sum he owed even were he to be asked for it. You couldn't pester a man on the brink of the grave about money, anyway. No, there was no alternative. Captain Jabez had in a twinkling dropped from the honest, God-fearing class of citizens, among which he had always been numbered, to that of the criminal. He was an *embezzler*!

CHAPTER XXIV

THE ANGEL OF DELIVERANCE

OVERWHELMED by the horror of his predicament Captain Jabez sat on his doorstep until the waves creeping in from the sea had submerged the outer bar and covered with seething currents of jade the reach of white sands before him. He had thought and thought and could think no longer, and still no plan of escape from his dilemma had formulated itself in his mind. Twist and turn events as he would, they invariably narrowed into the same hopeless circle which had at its center the wretched consciousness that he had sinned and that the consequences of that sin were before him. There was no way out of his entanglement — none. *Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.*

Ah, how many times he had preached from that relentless text! He could even now recall applying it to a hungry, roving lad who had filched from the village store two loaves of bread and a tin of beef. It was a petty theft but the town fathers, smug in their own integrity, had clamored loudly that the offender be brought to justice and he had clamored along with the rest. In fact, it was he who had lifted up his voice stronger than any of the others and urged on the more reluctant and merciful with the slogan, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

His eloquence had turned the tide against the wrongdoer who had as a result been held up as a public exam-

ple and compelled to suffer the full penalty of his crime. No one had been better pleased to witness his humiliation than the Old Captain who with stern Puritanism rejoiced that God was not mocked and that he who transgressed the laws of righteousness must bear the consequences thereof.

That the unlucky boy he had tracked down and delivered over to his judges might have had as worthy an excuse for his misdeed as he himself now had, never before had occurred to him and together with other thoughts born too late to be more than embryonic impulses it now passed before him in retrospect, leaving him saddened and miserable.

No, he could not recall ever having in the past preached mercy. He had regarded the doctrine as a weak-kneed, cowardly one, fit only for women. A man with an ounce of manhood in him would stand boldly by whatever he did and not whine for pity; that was his creed. How, therefore, never having extended mercy, could he hope to receive it? There was no mercy for him either on earth or in heaven. The God he worshiped was an inexorable diety who meted out a just return for the sins of humanity. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Such a gospel had never seemed unfair, and having long ago accepted it at its face value Captain Jabez had stretched it until it had served him as the excuse for many a transaction which otherwise might have plagued his conscience. Translated into the vernacular, you got in this world the consequences of what you did. If you were thoughtless, careless, over-trustful, why, so much the worse for you, that was all; he who was not shrewd enough to look after his own interests must expect to be worsted and not complain when he found himself with the small end of a bargain.

The watchword had proved a delightfully elastic, reas-

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suring one to live by. Up to the present, however, the small end had never fallen to the Old Captain's lot, and when like a boomerang his philosophy now suddenly came back upon him the reverse viewpoint it furnished offered novel material for reverie. Corinthians had never been a favorite book of his but he conceded there might be some truth in that charity chapter, after all.

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels * * *" mechanically he repeated the sentences, each one taking on as he did so a new significance. It was the great gospel of mercy, a gospel he had been wont to sneer at as spineless, and proudly boast he had no need for. Now suddenly, with humility, he reached out to it. The little corners he had cut, the clever bargains he had driven, the pound of flesh he had invariably extracted, when etched against this background of supreme love, stood vividly forth in all their sordidness, crudity, and selfishness. The leaky punt he had palmed off on the unsuspecting Ephraim Wise; the cracked pitcher he had sold at an exorbitant price to Martin Eldridge did not appear such scintillatingly brilliant feats after all. Nor did it seem such a triumph to have trapped and delivered over to his jailers that hungry boy whose eyes had dumbly pleaded for another chance.

If the universe were to be thus relentlessly conducted, what hope was there for sinners like himself? For with bowed head Captain Jabez contritely acknowledged he was a sinner and needed mercy. Unless this kindlier spirit swayed his judges not only was there no forgiveness for him in this world but it would be useless for him ever to aspire to enter into that eternal city whose maker and ruler is God. Meekly he rose, the pride gone out of him, and walking across to where the ocean restlessly lapped the sands, he stood looking out on the heaving immensity of the sea. How infinite was its vast, tenant-

less reach of space, and how frail and insignificant he was beside it! So it was with God. Man of himself had no claim to righteousness; only as he mirrored the Divine, in whose image he was created, was he holy.

A step sounded behind him and he turned to find Elizabeth at his elbow.

"Tea is ready, Pa," she said. "You better come right in. And here's a letter for you from Penelope." She held out the envelope. The Old Captain took it with trembling fingers.

Penelope! She would have to know of his disgrace — she who had looked up to him with such respect and affection. For the moment he had forgotten that. The thought was like pouring acid into an open wound. He held the letter in his hand, reluctant to open it. Probably it was another of those artless, prattling notes of hers asking for more money. He had not sent her any for some little time now and no doubt she was needing it. What could he answer? Instead of granting her request he would have to put an end to her dreams; confide to her the bitter truth; and summon her home. Then she would accuse herself of being the author of his misfortune and all his sacrifices would have been in vain.

"Ain't you goin' to open it, Pa?" piped Elizabeth's querulous voice.

Its intonation of curiosity broke in with jarring discord upon his reverie and sensing that delay was futile he mechanically tore the seal of the envelope and unfolded the crisp sheet of paper it contained, holding it at long reach from his eyes.

"Lor, Pa! You'd oughter have some new glasses," fretted Elizabeth, who, peering over his shoulder, was herself unable to decipher the writing.

"There ain't nothin' the matter with my glasses," was the retort. "My arms ain't long enough, that's all."

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The old man stretched the paper from him. There were only a few lines scrawled upon it but they were redolent with joy and triumph:

DEAR GRANDFATHER:

The book is done at last, or very nearly so, and I am sending you the enclosed check which is a part of the sum I have just received from my publishers as an advance royalty. The rest of the money I am keeping to buy some necessary clothes and defray a few extra expenses.

My dearest love goes to you.

As ever,

PENELOPE.

The letter contained neither date nor address, but in the reaction that surged over him Captain Jabez took no note of these omissions. All he sensed was a great throbbing consciousness of deliverance intermingled with reverent thankfulness. He took the mystic bit of paper and turned it between his fingers with awe and wonder. It was God-given, a tangible answer to his prayers. The check was for five hundred dollars and bore the signature of Gordon Hamilton.

"Well," inquired Elizabeth, peering over his shoulder, "what's she got to say this time? Ain't you goin' to let me read it?"

The Old Deacon extended the letter and its miraculous enclosure but no words came; he could not have spoken at that moment had his life depended on it.

"She ain't sent money!" his daughter gasped.

"Yes."

"My soul! Wherever did she get it?"

"From her book."

"You mean to tell me she got that for stuff she's written?"

He nodded feebly.

"But five hundred dollars! It's a fortune! It can't be."

"That's what she says."

Eagerly Elizabeth devoured the letter.

"What's an advance royalty?" she demanded.

"I dunno."

"Do you s'pose the check is good?"

"Why not? She wouldn't 'a' sent it if it hadn't been."

"But five hundred dollars, Pa! An' she must 'a' had more, too, for she says right here she's keepin' part of it to use. Why, I never heard of such a thing in all my born days! She couldn't have written a story that was worth all that money."

"That's what she says."

"Well, I never would 'a' dreamt it — that's all I can say. Penelope, of all people! Certainly I never heard her say anything at home I'd have given five hundred dollars to hear. Lord almighty, Pa! Don't it beat all?"

Captain Jabez had now caught his breath, and brought back to earth by his daughter's familiar jargon, was in more normal mood.

"It does seem kinder unbelievable," admitted he slowly. "Still, Penelope always was a smart little mite."

"But to write something worth five hundred dollars!" reiterated the still incredulous Elizabeth. "I can't for the life of me make it seem real."

"Nor I!" the Old Captain agreed.

He was not thinking any more of Elizabeth or her chatter. Instead his mind had leaped forward to the morrow and what he was going to do when a new day came. It was too late now to drive to Sawyer's Falls and reach the county bank before closing hours; but with the rising of another sun he would set forth and he would not rest until he had put back into the hands of Elisha Hurd the

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money he had drawn out of the institution. Then, and not until then, would his soul be at peace and he be able fearlessly to meet the eyes of his fellows.

How he wished the day of his emancipation would dawn!

Well, it would come. Just as surely as he had perceived the angel of retribution approaching, so he now saw the shining angel of deliverance. Before the passing of another twenty-four hours he would be free — *free!*

CHAPTER XXV

FREEDOM AND ITS PRICE

WHEN Captain Jabez awoke the following morning it was with a feeling that during the night twenty, thirty, fifty years had slipped from his shoulders. Like the criminal who faces execution and whose doom is averted by an eleventh-hour pardon, so with grateful heart he once more breathed the sweet consciousness of freedom. Never before had such a liberation been his. Thus, mused he, must Isaac have felt when his cords were loosened and the fagots heaped for his destruction scattered to the winds of heaven; so, too, the Children of Israel when the great barrier of the Red Sea rolled back its estranging waters, offering them an escape from their pursuers.

Again he could look up into the clear sky and bless his God for a new day. It came to him as he dressed that he would give much to live over the past and place a release similar to his own within the power of that lad on whom he had so long ago pronounced sentence. Alas, it was now too late to remedy that error. Goodness only knew where the boy was, or whether the chastisement meted out to him had set his feet in the path of righteousness or broken his spirit until he had never afterward had the courage to look the universe in the face. Punishment was apt to work one way or the other.

He, himself, for example, had he been disgraced in the eyes of his neighbors, could never have borne their con-

tempt and patronage. Rather he would have sought out some spot where no familiar countenance confronted him constantly to remind him by its silent reproach of the misstep he had made. Fortunately, however, all chance of such a fate had been removed. His secret was his own and unless he chose to divulge it, no one in the wide world would ever be the wiser regarding what he had done.

As he dashed cold water over his face and plastered down his thin gray locks before the mirror hanging above the small, three-cornered washstand, in sheer gratitude of spirit he grumbled out a tuneless bass to "The Spacious Firmament on High", marking the rhythm with his foot while he sang. Ah, it was indeed a spacious firmament that stretched before his vision that June morning! As far as eye could see it spread, a mighty larkspur dome that arched a sea azure as itself. How cloudless its expanse of blue; how gay the spangled waters flashing far away to the horizon! The whole world was a radiant harmony of joy and he himself a part of its universal rejoicing.

In this exalted mood he went downstairs; but there he found an atmosphere in wide contrast to his own ecstasy. Martha and Elizabeth had evidently awakened only to take up with fresh zeal their argument about Penelope precisely where they had laid it down the evening before. As he opened the kitchen door he could hear them disputing and speculating with an obvious lack of conviction as to how the girl happened to be so clever all of a sudden. They used the word *happen*, as if her success was nothing more than a matter of chance, a stroke of good luck that carried with it no actual merit. They even went so far as to insinuate that there might be some mistake about the news she had sent and declared that should her roseate tidings prove to be without foun-

dation it would cause neither of them surprise. It hardly seemed likely that a person such as she could have attained at a bound this pinnacle unassisted.

Jealous for his favorite's fame, their attitude of skepticism ruffled the Old Captain.

"But there's the check," protested he, breaking irritably into the conversation before either of his daughters was aware of his presence. "If the check don't bear out Penelope's assertion, I don't know what will."

"Yes, Pa, of course there's the check," Elizabeth conceded grudgingly. "For the minute I'd forgotten that. It certainly does seem to back up what the child says. Still, how's there any knowin' it's good? You ain't tried to cash it yet."

She was rewarded by seeing a startled expression leap into Captain Jabez's eyes.

"An' even if it is all right," she went on, "there's somethin' queer, in my opinion, about the whole thing. Whoever heard of a man payin' five hundred dollars an' more for a story just made up out of a person's head? 'Tain't as if there was a mite of truth in it."

"How much do you know, pray tell us, 'Liza, about what printers pay for books?" her father demanded, lashed into ill temper.

Elizabeth, habitually wont to offer airy statements for which she had but scant foundation, faltered.

"Well," hedged she, "of course I ain't ever written a book myself. But I have read enough of 'em so'st to be some judge. To my mind it's safe enough to say that fifty dollars, or a hundred at the outside, is all the best of 'em is worth. Why, 'most anybody would undertake to write a book for that price. I would myself," she concluded gravely.

"I'll bet you'd have a time disposin' of it," interrupted the practical Martha.

"I don't reckon I would," was the complacent reply. "Didn't I write a paper on the Landin' of the Pilgrims once for the Grange that lots of folks down at the church said had oughter be printed? Writin' ain't any great stunt if you've got the time to do it. Likely up in Boston Penelope ain't had a soul to speak to an' nothin' to do but write an' write. She'd be a poor sort if she couldn't do a book under conditions such as those — 'specially if they let her just make it all up."

"Likely you'd go so far as to say Penelope's inherited what literary talent she's got from you," sniffed Captain Jabez with a mirthless laugh.

"Lor, Pa! Why will you be so foolish as to pay attention to Eliza?" Martha asked. "She don't know any more about books than you or I."

With injured dignity Elizabeth looked up from the corn-cake she was buttering.

"Maybe readin' books don't give a body a claim to knowin' about 'em," she returned sarcastically. "I can't say as to that. Still, I don't see as it's out of place, since we're on the subject, to affirm that I've done a sight of readin' in my day. I'll bet there ain't one of them *Godey's Magazines* in the attic that I ain't been through from cover to cover — not to mention 'Pilgrim's Progress', 'The Children of the Abbey', 'Pickwick Papers', an' — an' — the Bible." She came to a sudden stop, her literary catalogue exhausted.

Without deigning to reply to the argument, the Old Captain pushed his chair back from the breakfast table.

"I'm goin' over to Sawyer's Falls!" announced he, addressing his elder daughter quite as if the younger one did not exist. "Want anything?"

"We're needin' butter, Pa."

"Butter? But you had butter last week."

"It's about gone."

"Gone! Two pounds! What in heaven's name do you do with so much butter, I'd like to know? Grease the under side of every wave that rolls up on the beach?" blustered the Captain. "Why, you could butter all Belleport with the butter we use in this house. I'll bet there ain't another family in this town that uses the butter we do."

Martha paid no attention to the tirade but began to scrape up the dishes.

"How'd you come to use up such a quantity?" her father demanded, after waiting an interval for her to put up a defense and finding she did not intend to do so.

"We always use two pounds of butter a week," was the placid response.

"But two pounds!" fumed Captain Jabez.

She watched him while, like a fire, his wrath flickered up, blazed, died down, and subsided into muttering embers. In the meantime, undisturbed, she had collected the food and carried it into the pantry, grouped the glasses and silver on the shelf near the dishpan, and methodically piled up the plates and saucers. The process was systematically done and her speed and deftness appealed to the Old Captain who had absently been following her motions while he fidgeted apologetically with the sugar-bowl cover. He respected Martha. She never allowed herself to be bullied or browbeaten.

"Well," he at length capitulated, as he always did if one had the patience to wait, "an' what else do you want besides butter?"

"I'll get the list," she replied serenely. "There are quite a few things — starch, prunes, vanilla, cookin' crackers, an' let me see —" checking the items off on her fingers, she paused.

"Good Lord!"

"It does take quite a lot of food to keep a family from going hungry," observed she pleasantly.

"I should say it did!"

"If you'd rather have me I can get the things at the village store."

The suggestion worked like magic. Captain Jabez had not rather, and Martha knew it. When money was to be spent he always preferred to be the one to spend it. If you left it to the women, they were certain to see something else they wanted when they reached the base of supplies and lengthen out the original list. No, he would do the buying himself. Therefore, he took the paper his daughter handed him without more grumbling and, tucking it into his vest pocket, before it could be augmented by further codicils, he stalked into the hall and reached for his hat.

He was not now in as ecstatic a mood as he had been when in the early dawn he had hummed "The Spacious Firmament on High"; nevertheless the prospect of his errand did much to soothe his ruffled spirits and mentally he resolved to add half a dozen bananas, or perhaps a third of a dozen, to Martha's order as a pleasant surprise for her. After all, she was a good girl and meant to be thrifty. He liked to make her a little present now and then.

He had, however, no more than hitched up his mare and climbed into the front seat of his wagon, than with no inconsiderable annoyance he espied Dick Morton turning in at the gate. Morton, of all people! What was he doing here at this hour of the morning, delaying Captain Jabez's trip to the bank? It was most unfortunate. Ordinarily the Captain would have welcomed such an innovation for visitors were few in this out-of-the-way village; furthermore, he cherished a latent curiosity con-

cerning Dick and his affairs and would have enjoyed the chance to gratify it. But to-day he had bigger business on hand than to loiter and talk with any one, be he the prince of gossips. Nevertheless, there was no escaping his guest. Besides, there was a resolute directness in the young man's manner of approach that was ominous with purpose. Either he was the bearer of tidings or he was bent on an errand, and neither of these claims Captain Jabez dared deny.

Instantly his thoughts flew to Penelope. Could anything be wrong with her? Could it be that she and her former lover had been meeting in Boston and, adjusting their differences, had they gathered up the threads of their lost romance and pieced them together? Almost anything was possible and more perturbed than he would have been willing to confess, the Old Captain swung himself from his wagon seat and hastened to meet the intruder.

"How are you, Dick?" he called, when the younger man was within hailing distance. "Down from the city, eh?"

"Yes, I came down last night."

"You don't say! Takin' a vacation?"

"No," was the grave reply. "I came on business."

"Oh, business." With the relief the explanation afforded, the Captain lapsed from anxiety into humor. "Tryin' to sell some of your bonds in Belleport?" he inquired facetiously.

No answering smile, however, greeted the jest.

"I'm not here on the firm's business, Mr. Allen," returned the boy. "I'm on my own this time — or rather yours. How long is it since you have heard from Penelope?"

Instantly the suspicions the elder man had lulled to rest rose in clamoring chorus.

"Penelope? Why, I had a letter from her only yesterday."

"Where was she?"

"On Pinckney Street, same's she's been all along. Why?"

Unconsciously Captain Jabez edged forward until his hand rested on his visitor's arm.

"She didn't send you any other address?"

"No. What are you drivin' at, Dick? Out with it."

"Penelope isn't at Pinckney Street, Mr. Allen, and she hasn't been there for over a month."

"What makes you think so?"

"Because I telephoned there and her landlady told me. She said Penelope went out one morning and never came back again."

He saw the countenance opposite him pale; but the next moment the old man was smiling tranquilly.

"Well, there can't be nothin' the matter 'cause the letter came last night."

Ignoring the comment Dick went on:

"The landlady told me she had no idea where Penelope had gone. She said about a week ago an expressman came and took away her trunk; then a gentleman came, paid the rent and gave up the room. That is all the woman knew about it."

"Well?" demanded Captain Jabez, waiting expectantly.

"Doesn't it seem a little strange?" Dick ventured.

"Her bein' gone somewheres else, you mean? Well, mebbe it does," admitted the Captain. "Still, there can't be nothin' wrong because the letter came all right. Likely Penelope didn't take to the woman she was boardin' with, that was all, an' decided to move. Of course, it was sorter queer of her not to mention it to me; but no doubt she was afraid it might worry us was we to know she

hadn't been comfortable an' contented where she was."

"Then it doesn't appear mysterious to you?"

"Mysterious?"

"Yes. You don't see anything odd about her stealing off and giving no address?"

"Not if Penelope'd had trouble with the woman an' didn't like her."

"But the man who paid her room rent?" young Morton persisted.

"Come, Dick, what are you aimin' at?" burst out Captain Jabez impatiently. "If you've got anything to say to me why don't you say it instead of levelin' back-handed blows at Penelope? I tell you the thing is natural enough. She ain't hidin' nothin'. I'll bet you a penny her address is on the letter I have in my pocket this minute."

Nervously he searched for the missive and drew it forth with trembling hand; then from another pocket he produced his spectacles.

"Now we'll settle this," announced he with a triumphant air. "Unless the child has some reason of her own for concealin' where she is, it'll be on this paper."

"Yes, *unless she has some reason of her own for concealin' where she is*," repeated Dick significantly.

The Captain nodded, the sinister significance of the phrase lost on him.

"What reason could she have, do you think, for hiding herself?" Dick presently asked, his gaze riveted on Captain Jabez.

"Why, the one I told you, most likely — not wantin' to fuss me," returned the Old Captain lightly as he unfolded the letter and glanced at its contents. After he had done so he did not speak immediately.

"Well?"

"The note was scrawled in a hurry," Jabez Allen said

slowly. "There don't seem to be no address on it."

A bitter smile curled young Morton's lip.

"Penelope did not forget that address, Mr. Allen," announced he with solemn emphasis. "She omitted it intentionally."

"Why should she?" inquired the puzzled Old Captain with the innocence of a child.

"Because she did not want you or any one else to know where she was," retorted Dick. "But I know," he went on with swiftly mounting scorn. "I know where she is staying. She is at the house of a rich Boston man who has influenced her into deceiving you and covering up her tracks."

"You don't mean —" the dazed expression of the Captain deepened slowly into understanding, then into horror. "You liar!" he shouted. "You infernal liar!"

"I am no liar, Mr. Allen," declared Dick Morton sadly. "I only wish in this case that I were. What I am telling you is the wretched truth. Penelope is at a house on Beacon Street. You must not blame her, poor girl. No doubt she was perfectly innocent of evil when she went there. How was she to know the ways of a city rascal like this brute of a —"

"My God! I'll kill him for it — I'll kill him!" broke forth Captain Jabez, clinching his fists with passion. "What's the villain's name? You know it, Dick? Tell me what it is."

"The man at whose house Penelope is staying is named Hamilton," answered Dick, not a little alarmed at the fires he had ignited.

"Not Gordon Hamilton?"

"Yes. You know him then." Dick evinced surprise.

But there was no answer. All the disbelief of Martha and Elizabeth, all their insinuating comment was reëcho-

ing through the mind of Captain Jabez. As if he had received his death blow, he began to shred into tiny pieces a slip of green paper enclosed between the sheets of Penelope's letter.

"It's true!" he moaned beneath his breath, scattering the fragments despairingly at his feet. "My God, *it's true!*"

CHAPTER XXVI

A CLEW TO THE MYSTERY

TEN o'clock saw Captain Jabez Allen bound from home on a very different errand from that which he had anticipated when he had arisen from his bed and so lustily hummed "The Spacious Firmament on High."

"I can't think what could have whiffled Pa round from goin' to Sawyer's Falls to postin' off to Boston," said Elizabeth for the hundredth time. "An hour ago he was all for buyin' butter, an' prunes, an' starch; then out of a clear sky in he comes, hustles into his Sunday clothes, an' says he's goin' to Boston. What on earth do you make of it, Martha?"

"I'm sure I don't know," was the weary answer.

"But Pa ain't been to Boston in years — not in a quarter of a century, far's I can remember. What can have took him there so sudden now?"

"I've no idea."

"Don't you think it's queer?"

"Yes," came reluctantly from the truthful Martha.

"Of course you do!" rejoined Elizabeth with triumph. "You wouldn't be human if you didn't. Didn't he tell you nothin' of what he was goin' to do — drop no hint at all?"

"I didn't ask any questions."

"Bless my soul, Martha! There's times when you're the most exasperatin' person on the face of the earth, if you are my sister. You never asked Pa a thing? Just

took it as if kitin' off to the city was an everyday happenin'? For pity's sakes, why not?"

"Pa warn't in no mood to be pestered; 'twas easy enough to see that."

"S'pose he warn't? I'd have asked him just the same."

"I know you would," nodded Martha, with a faint smile.

"Well, why shouldn't I?" piped Elizabeth, instantly on the defensive at something the tone implied.

"Oh, I don't know, Eliza," sighed Martha. "Don't let's argue."

"But ain't you upset about Pa?"

"N — o."

"You are too, Martha Allen," the inquisitor burst out on seeing her sister flinch before the question. "You are upset. You're awful upset."

She waited for a moment for a denial of her accusation but none came and the fact that her random thrust was not parried frightened her.

"You ain't imaginin' there's really anything the matter, are you, Martha?" she asked breathlessly.

"What could be the matter?"

"I don't know," replied Elizabeth, with a helpless whimper. "Something may have happened to Penelope. You don't s'pose it has, do you?"

"How can I tell, Eliza?" Martha demanded, hounded into peevishness. "I don't know any more about it than you do."

"Honest?"

"Certainly I don't."

Mollified by the words Elizabeth allowed herself to settle back into the rocking-chair.

"So Pa didn't tell you no more this time than he told me," announced she with jealous satisfaction.

There was no response.

"I wonder what sort of a mess Penelope's got into," ruminated Elizabeth aloud.

"What makes you think she's in a mess?"

"Oh, because I can't see any other reason for Pa rushin' off to Boston like as if the devil was at his heels. He got up fully intendin' to go to the bank an' cash that check. I know Pa. He was itchin' to find out if it was good. Then quicker'n greased lightnin' round he veers like a weathercock an' starts for town. Somethin' come over him 'twixt the time he went to hitch up the horse an' the time he come in. What was it?"

"Oh, Eliza, you drive me crazy with your questions! How do I know what whisked Pa round?"

"Well, all I can say is it's very, very strange," announced Elizabeth with dignity.

"Thinkin' it's strange won't get you nowhere," was the tart retort. "You've a thousand things to do an' in my opinion you much better start doin' 'em than to be settin' round here askin' profitless questions. Didn't Pa ask you to feed the hens?"

"I ain't forgot the hens, Martha. You needn't go proddin' me on. I guess I can be trusted to carry out Pa's requests well as you can."

"You don't seem to be carryin' 'em out."

"That's because I ain't got ready to yet."

Nevertheless it was apparent that the reminder spurred the delinquent to action, for she arose and put on her sun-bonnet.

"The meal is in the barn in the first bin," called Martha in a conciliatory tone, as her sister went out. She detested wrangling and was always the first to make overtures for peace.

But Elizabeth digned no reply. Instead she went out, closing the screen door behind her with a spirited bang.

"Now she'll grump an' gloom all day," sighed Martha aloud, as she stretched the ironing board across two kitchen chairs. "I wish to goodness I hadn't spoken as I did. I'd oughter remembered how touchy she is. But the way she harps on anything she gets ahold of to harp on, sets every nerve in my body on edge."

Nevertheless it was characteristic of Martha that notwithstanding her nerves were strained to the utmost and that a secret and more intelligent anxiety than her sister's clouded her eyes, she worked off this tension not in idle chatter but by directing it into the grooves of the daily routine. She ironed her father's shirt with extraordinary vigor and did not permit the speculations with which her mind was occupied to interfere with her turning back the cuffs precisely on the blue line so that buttons and buttonholes made exact connections. Yet all the while the hot iron moved rhythmically back and forth across the cloth she was murmuring to herself:

"Penelope! Of course it's Penelope! Somethin's the matter an' Pa, knowin' we were dead set against the child goin' to Boston from the beginnin', ain't for tellin' us 'til he has to. He hates to be twitted, an' there'd be no stoppin' Eliza's *I told you so*. What can the girl have done now?"

A score of fears battled in the elder woman's mind. Scant as was her acquaintance with the pitfalls of a city she was sufficiently well informed mentally to construct myriad horrors that might have engulfed a creature young and innocent as her niece.

"We'd never oughter listened to Pa an' let her go," she declared with a vicious sweep of the iron. "There's times when Pa ain't as knowin' as he thinks he is, an' this was one. I wish I'd stood right up an' faced him instead of lettin' Penelope wheedle down my better judgment. Now goodness only knows what's to pay! He

either got some word in that letter an' didn't show it to us; or he suspected somethin'. 'Twas one or the other. He certainly didn't get no message by telephone or we'd have known."

Shaking her head with a baffled air, she took up the steaming shirt and spread it on the clotheshorse and afterward reached into the basket for another. No matter what befell, Pa would need clean shirts.

In the meantime Elizabeth had reached the barn and having secured a wooden measure had betaken herself to the meal chest. She had not, however, accomplished this introductory portion of her mission without delay, for she had been distracted by a string of passing coal barges and had stopped to watch while the crew of the tug towing them slowed up to tighten the hawser connecting the first boat. She had loitered, too, until the scarlet chain was once again in motion and steaming off toward Nantucket Shoals; then reproachfully she had caught herself up and hurried without further delay into the barn.

She went swiftly to the bin and hurriedly scooped up a measureful of its contents. The task completed, she closed the cover with a force so emphatic that it whirled a cloud of powdered grain into the air and made her sneeze.

"I always did abominate hens," gasped she, when the fifth sneeze had subsided and she had wiped her eyes.

Her antagonism did not, however, prevent her from at last carrying the food into the yard and scattering it among the clucking assembly that greedily clustered about her feet.

She was part way across the lawn and nearing the house before she noticed that the empty quart measure was still in her hand.

"Well, look at me now!" was her sharp ejaculation.

"If I ain't cartin' this thing back to the house! Drat them hens!"

Of course there was nothing for her but to wheel about once more and return through the hot sun to the barn. Elizabeth was exasperated.

"Them infernal hens have put back my whole mornin'," complained she indignantly. "I always told Pa they warn't worth their keep. Why he will have 'em I can't see."

Had not her recent sneezing paroxysm served as a warning, she would have angrily thumped down the measure as a vent to her irritation; as it was she was forced to content herself with placing it gently on the top of the nearest bin and going speedily out. She had been absent from the house an appallingly long time, and she knew Martha would be wondering why she did not return to help with the ironing. Some allusion to her dilatory habits was sure to welcome her when she did get back and the thought caused her to quicken her steps.

It was just when she reached the center of the clam-shell driveway that she discovered the fragments of greenish paper on the ground. She might not have noticed them had not the crushed shell looked so glaringly white in the vivid sunshine and the mosaic of paper so green by contrast. At any rate there they lay, and as she idly glanced at them they took on a vaguely familiar aspect. She had seen something of that identical color recently. Her father had held it in his hand; she had held it. It was the check, the check from Penelope! She stopped and gathered the scraps together, placing them on her flattened palm. Yes, it was the check, the check! Either by mistake or deliberately her father had destroyed it.

Had the question concerned any one else she would have advanced the former theory. But she had lived

with the Old Captain too long to accuse him of such wanton carelessness. No, the check had been deliberately torn to bits and scattered to the winds of heaven; he had done the deed for some purpose of his own and it was this mysterious purpose that had so abruptly taken him to Boston.

Ah, she had something to tell Martha now — Martha who always received her stories with withering disbelief and scorn. Bursting with her tidings, she raced across the grass.

"Martha!" she called, the instant she was inside the door. "Martha! It warn't Penelope that took Pa to Boston after all. 'Twas the check. There was something wrong with it. See! He's tore it all up."

With a crash Martha set the flatiron down on the ring of metal at her elbow.

"What?"

"Pa tore that check Penelope sent him all to flinders," repeated Elizabeth. "Look! Here's the pieces. I found 'em in the driveway."

Without a word Martha reached for the shreds of green paper. Try as she would to steady herself, her hand trembled noticeably.

"How do you s'pose he come to do it?" interrogated Elizabeth, all excitement.

"I don't know."

Martha had turned away with the bits of paper clutched tightly in her fingers.

"What are you goin' to do with 'em?" her sister demanded, planting herself in her path. "You don't mean to burn 'em!"

"No."

"Well, what are you goin' to do?"

"Put 'em away."

"What for?"

"So'st they won't tempt nobody," was the terse reply.

"Mebbe 'twould be as well. I hadn't thought of that. If anybody was to find 'em they could piece 'em together, couldn't they? 'Twas lucky I found 'em, warn't it?"

"Yes, very lucky."

A look of suppressed anxiety had come into Martha's face.

"What on earth could 'a' led Pa of all people to tear up money?"

"I — don't — know."

Had not Elizabeth been so busy hanging up her sun-bonnet she would have seen that the eyes of the elder woman had widened into a frightened stare.

"Mebbe Pa was mad when he found something wrong with the check an' posted right off to Boston to get a good one," she suddenly announced, as if inspired by a brilliant solution of the enigma. "That would be just like Pa."

Fussily she began to shift about the rolls of dampened clothes lying in the basket. Elizabeth never took the pieces as they came but always selected the ones she preferred to iron and left the rest to Martha. Anxious to avoid any comment on her delay in returning to help, she went hastily to work and welcoming the fact that her interrogating tongue was at last silent Martha went on with the ironing.

CHAPTER XXVII

SIDELIGHTS

CAPTAIN JABEZ in the meantime was traveling with squared jaw resolutely toward Boston in a stuffy car that was all the stuffier because he had been bred up amid an immensity of pure air. The trip seemed interminable. Under the best of conditions it probably would have been long to one who traveled seldom; but to-day when every hour, every moment of delay was menacing with danger, he raged inwardly at his helplessness to hurry matters. The train fairly crawled. Now it stopped to change engines, now to switch on other cars; still farther up the line it slowed down and stood puffing on a siding until the express from the tip of the Cape rumbled up and annexed its two shabby cars to the main train. In the interim brakemen ambled along the track, chatting and joking together, and the conductor went into a nearby bakery where he partook of coffee, doughnuts, a piece of apple pie and afterward got weighed. Nobody appeared to care in the least whether Captain Jabez ever reached Boston or not; and when at length the engine did saunter into the South Station his nerves had reached the breaking point.

Clutched tightly in his hand he carried a crumpled scrap of paper on which was scrawled the address Dick Morton had given him; but how he was to find his way to the house indicated he had no idea. So far as he was able to ascertain Beacon Street was a realm cut off from the rest of the world. No street cars went there, no

busses; nor could any of the pedestrians of whom he inquired give him more explicit information than that it was somewhere near the Common, the Public Garden and the Esplanade. As Captain Jabez was ignorant of the exact location of any of these places, and in fact had never heard of one of them the instructions offered did him no good.

At last, after stopping some dozen rushing individuals and receiving from each different advice, he came to the conclusion that it was useless to inquire of anybody else and set out to walk. Accordingly he elbowed his way up Summer Street, dodging the whirl of traffic as best he could and becoming more panic-stricken at every step. Sooner or later he would be slaughtered in cold blood, he knew he should; such a fate was inevitable. The drays, the cabs, the tooting automobiles, the surging crowds confused and terrified him. Once he jostled from the curb a man who, after wheeling on him and swearing roundly, audibly remarked to his companion:

"Some old Rube from the country!"

And once, when he lost courage to obey the beckoning hand of the policeman stationed at the crossing, the officer called sharply:

"Come on! Come on there! You can't stand teetering on the edge of the sidewalk all day blocking the traffic."

Obedient to authority Captain Jabez had come on, but it was with the conviction that he was casting himself beneath a Juggernaut that would pass along leaving him mangled and lifeless in its wake. He even paused after reaching the other side of the street because his trembling knees refused for the moment to bear him on.

At last, however, he found the Common and the Public Garden. Ah, here were areas of safety! He stood still *within* their security and mopped his dripping brow.

The Esplanade could not now be far away. On he wandered in his search for it until he reached the Cambridge side of the Basin, where exhausted he breathlessly sat down on a bench. It was almost noon and he was hot, tired, and hungry. His Sunday boots, habitually exchanged during the week for more roomy and pliable sneakers, pinched his feet. It seemed as if he could never drag himself a step farther. Nevertheless the quiet of the spot refreshed him, and the breeze sweeping the water soon stimulated his courage. He pulled himself erect and stood gazing uncertainly about. Beacon Street must be close at hand. He would inquire once more to be certain that he did not stray out of his way and then he would go on. Already he was impatient to be on his errand.

Yet notwithstanding the fact that he waited for quite an interval no one passed. The sun mounted higher, sending down scorching noontide rays; the gulls careened in air or dipped to feed at the margin of the channel; but save for their presence not a soul invaded his solitude. In the distance, to be sure, where the road and bridge met, a chaos of traffic was visible but it was far away and he lacked the energy to reach it, nor did the motorcars that now and again shot past before he could bring any of them to a halt afford him aid.

It was just when hope had sunk to its lowest ebb that he heard a sharp report behind him and turning, saw an automobile with a small green cross at the front slacken its speed and come to a stop. It contained two persons: a wiry, colored man in gray livery who drove the car, and a powerfully built individual with smooth face, iron-gray hair, and keen blue eyes that looked out from behind a pair of shell-rimmed spectacles. A humorous half-smile curved the big man's lips.

"Well," called he to his companion, who had leaped

to the ground the instant the motor was still, "which one is it this time, Emmons?"

"The back, left-hand one, Doctor. I'll have it on in a second though, sir. Too bad to hold you up. Were you in a terrible rush this morning?"

"No more than usual," grinned the doctor. "I never have time to waste, you know that. Fortunately, however, it is not my day at the hospital. Just get us along as soon as you can."

"Indeed I will, sir."

Captain Jabez saw his opportunity. Timidly he approached.

"Could you tell me the way to Beacon Street?" asked he of the owner of the car.

"Beacon Street? It is over across the Basin." The man pointed to a line of sun-flooded houses.

"But I've just come from over there," exclaimed the Old Captain in dismay. "They told me Beacon Street was near the Esplanade."

"So it is. This entire embankment circling the Basin is the Esplanade."

"Oh!"

"I take it you are a visitor to Boston."

"Yes, sir. I don't get to the city very often. I came up from the Cape to-day to see my granddaughter who is — is — stayin' on Beacon Street. Mebbe you could tell me how to get to this number." The captain held out his grimy slip of paper.

The doctor took it, glanced down, then raised his eyes with surprise.

"Miss Turner is your granddaughter?"

"Penelope? Yes." Captain Jabez was almost too astonished to speak. "Do you —"

"I am on my way to see her now."

"She ain't sick?"

"Oh, no. I just keep an eye on her so she won't be," smiled Doctor Towner reassuringly. "I'll take you along if you like."

For the fraction of a second Captain Jabez hesitated.

"With you, do you mean?"

"Certainly. There is plenty of room."

"You want I should ride alongside of you in that thing?"

The physician laughed.

"Just that."

"I s'pose I might," ventured the Cape Codder at length. "I ain't never set foot in one of the durn things, an' here in the city it seems kinder like takin' my life in my hands. Still, I'm terrible anxious to get to Beacon Street an' I reckon if I ain't killed in the goin' this would fetch me there quicker'n most anything else."

"I reckon so too."

The Captain stroked his chin as if considering; then with gingerly deliberation he climbed into the car and seated himself beside the doctor.

"How'd you come to know Penelope, anyhow?" he asked, a remnant of wonder still furrowing his forehead.

"Oh, I have been looking out for Miss Turner for some time."

"Lookin' out for her?"

The doctor nodded.

"Watching over her so she won't overdo. Of course, she is much better now. Still she is an ambitious little thing and —"

"She ain't been sick!"

"Didn't you know?" Instantly the physician saw he had made a misstep but it was too late to retrieve it.

"No." The old man's face hardened.

"Perhaps Miss Turner thought it better not to alarm you," Doctor Towner suggested kindly.

"Alarm me? She ain't been that ill?" came from his companion in an awe-stricken voice.

"She has been pretty sick," admitted the doctor. "But you have nothing to worry about now. She is quite herself again."

"Do you mean she was in danger of dyin'?"

"I was anxious about her at one time, yes."

"Why warn't I told?" burst from the indignant Captain Jabez.

"Mr. Hamilton was to let you know. I thought he had done so."

"Hamilton, Gordon Hamilton!"

"Yes."

"He didn't tell me anything."

"Ah!"

"What had he to do with it, anyway?" demanded the irate questioner.

"Mr. Hamilton?"

"Yes."

"Why, it was he who brought Miss Turner to Beacon Street. That is where he lives. I fancied he might be an old friend."

"I never heard of him before in all my life."

"Yet you seemed familiar with his name."

The Captain bit his lip.

"What I mean to say is that although I've heard his name, I don't know nothin' of the man."

"But your granddaughter does."

There was no reply.

"What was the matter with Penelope?" Captain Jabez suddenly inquired.

"It was a peculiar case," replied the physician evasively. "A sort of collapse."

"Collapse? An' what should set Penelope to collapsin'?"

Doctor Towner answered slowly, choosing his words.

"Miss Turner seemed tired, exhausted."

"You ain't tellin' me the truth, sir — or if you are, you're tellin' me only part of it," announced the Old Captain with disconcerting directness. "I want to know the whole thing. I've got to know. It's important I should."

The imperative note in the final clause was not to be disregarded.

Doctor Towner temporized. Evidently quite by accident he had stirred up a hornet's nest. He wished with all his heart he had never encountered this cantankerous old gentleman. But there was no putting Captain Jabez off.

"I'm askin' you what was the matter with my granddaughter?" persisted he tensely. "I've a right to know, ain't I?"

For the first time the physician's assurance appeared to desert him.

"Of course, of course!" he floundered. "I see no reason why there should be any secret about it. Miss Turner was run down."

"From workin' too much?"

"Partly that, yes."

"An' what else?"

"She didn't seem to have had quite the proper nourishment."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Why, that she either had not eaten the right kind of food, or had not eaten a sufficient amount of it," hedged the doctor.

But it would have taken a cleverer person than Doctor Herbert Towner to escape such a resolute and pitiless cross-examiner.

"Which do you think it was?"

"I cannot say."

"Still, you likely have an opinion."

"I rather feel, since you press the matter, that she had not had enough," was the reluctant confession.

"Not enough to eat?"

"It seemed so to me."

Uneasily the doctor fidgeted with his glove. Would the new tire never be adjusted and an escape from his questioner afforded?

"In other words you think my granddaughter was sick because she was hungry," announced the fisherman baldly.

"I thought that, yes. Still, she never hinted so."

"She — wouldn't — be — apt to."

A moment later the doctor thought he heard from the man at his elbow a muttered:

"My God!"

"An' this Hamilton — it's Gordon Hamilton, you say?" went on the insistent voice.

"Yes."

"Where did he come in?"

"I don't know."

"But you know where you first run afoul of him," insisted Captain Jabez sharply.

"Oh, the Hamiltons have been patients of mine for years."

"Nice folks?"

At any other moment the doctor would have laughed to hear the blue blood and social prestige of the House of Hamilton so vulgarly and casually assailed.

"Why, man alive," he ejaculated, "the Hamiltons are one of Boston's first families."

"That may be," was the imperturbable retort. "Still, it don't tell me nothin' about their characters."

"There are no finer people anywhere."

"Oh, there ain't, eh?"

A strained silence followed.

"Who's in the family?" inquired Captain Jabez presently.

"Just Mr. Hamilton."

"He ain't got no folks?"

"Both his father and mother are dead."

"How old a chap might he be?"

"Between forty and fifty."

Once more the captain gave a significant "Oh!" following it with the words:

"He ain't young, then."

"That is as you look at it."

"So this Hamilton lives by himself on Beacon Street," Captain Jabez remarked presently, as if following some other mental clew.

"Well, hardly by himself," cut in the doctor. "He has a housekeeper, a butler and a retinue of old servants to keep him company."

"Oh!"

It was evident this information caused another revolution in the fisherman's mind for he paused as if to reconstruct certain of his preconceived ideas.

"An' where was it you first sighted my granddaughter?" he at length demanded.

"Mr. Hamilton's housekeeper or one of the other servants telephoned me. He had just brought her home."

"She was sick when he brought her?"

For a second time the opinions the Captain held received an obvious jolt.

"Yes, very sick."

"Because—because of the reason you said?" It seemed impossible for the old man to put the ignominious facts into plainer words.

Doctor Towner nodded.

"Do you figger Hamilton knew what was the matter with her?"

"He must have known. If not, he got the truth from me," announced the doctor with satisfaction.

"What did he say?"

"Practically nothing."

"He warn't surprised then?"

"He did not appear to be."

"You take it that he knew all along."

"I imagine he did, yes. Anyway, I was determined he should realize the conditions. If he had overworked and underpaid a woman, I felt he should see the results," burst out the physician with spirit.

"But he warn't employin' my granddaughter, man!"

"Oh!"

"What made you think he was?"

"I don't know," was the slow answer. "I rather leaped at the conclusion, I fancy. It seemed the only explanation."

"Explanation of what?"

"Why, of his bringing her home, hiring a nurse, and trying to put her on her feet again. I thought he was squaring things with his conscience. It would be like his New Englandism."

"So that was your theory, eh?" Captain Jabez stroked his chin.

"One of them."

For a tense instant the Old Captain turned and looked the other man piercingly in the eye.

"It's to find out Mr. Gordon Hamilton's precise reason for doin' what he's done that I've come to Boston," observed he quietly.

CHAPTER XXVIII

FACE TO FACE

THEY drove along the river's rim without speaking, each man welcoming an interval for thought. At any other time Captain Jabez would have been all excitement over his first adventure at motoring. But in the present instance a terrible calm possessed him. Had it promoted the speed of his journey, he would have ascended into an aeroplane or descended into a submarine with equal callousness. How he got to Penelope did not matter so long as he got there quickly.

Amid a blur of sensations among which predominated a Spartan resignation to whatever fate befell he whirled along, vaguely conscious as he went of a rush of air; a confusion of moving things; and rows of buildings that flashed past and disappeared before he could normally visualize them. The car was crossing Harvard Bridge now and with the water far below on each side he had the feeling that he was flying through space to the crashing of worlds and the uproar of crying humanity. What a din and rumble rose from the jarring boards over which he rattled! Even when the automobile veered into Beacon Street and rolled along the narrow channel of road shut in between lines of houses there was still the same babel of sound, the same inferno of speeding vehicles. At intervals men and women loitering on the curb would plunge into the seething maelstrom and the Old Captain would close his eyes in horror, not daring to witness the results of their foolhardiness.

It was in the heart of a hell like this that Penelope had been living! What wonder she was ill, poor girl! The fisherman's face hardened and unconsciously he clinched his fist with hatred toward the merciless city that had so cruelly treated his child. Not only had the accursed demon robbed her of her health, starving her to the borders of destruction, but it had perhaps filched from her her good name and left her to lie a battered and tarnished thing amid the cast-off filth of its gutters. A cruel Circe, a great city! An enchantress without a soul, who lured, dazzled, and then pitilessly laughed at that which she destroyed. If once he got his granddaughter from out the monster's malevolent clutch never again would he allow it to get hold upon her.

"I have been thinking," observed Doctor Towner, suddenly bringing the dreamer's bitter reveries to an end, "that perhaps I won't stop to see Miss Turner to-day, after all. It is getting late and I have other important calls to make. Some future time will do as well. That will leave her free to visit with you without interruption."

"But you've come way round here now."

"That does not matter. I was glad to do it. Besides, I have a patient nearby."

"You're sure Penelope ain't needin' you?"

"Oh, no! She's all right. I just like to make sure of it now and then, that is all. You see, I have become very fond of the little lady."

At the friendliness of the tone Captain Jabez's countenance softened; but its faint smile was dispelled a second later by the additional words:

"Mr. Hamilton is not taking any chances with her health."

The next moment the car had glided with velvet smoothness up to the curb and stopped before an imposing colonial mansion.

"Here you are!" announced the doctor, trying to assume an ordinary conversational manner. "I hope you will find your granddaughter a credit to my care. I've done the best I could."

For answer the Old Captain put out his hand.

"I don't doubt it, sir, an' I'm thankful to you not only for what you have done for her but for fetchin' me round here. I reckon I'd never have made port but for you."

"Boston is a confusing city."

"It's damnable!" was Captain Jabez's emphatic comment as he moved up the walk.

Left to himself he mounted the stone steps and halted, looking about for some means by which to announce his presence. There was neither knocker nor doorbell as he knew them and in consequence he rapped impatiently. But the rap brought no response. Again he examined the premises.

"Whole place sealed up tight as a drum," soliloquized he indignantly. "She might as well be in a prison."

The words idly uttered brought to his imagination a possibility so unpleasant that it caused him to continue with determination:

"Well, I'm goin' in anyhow, damn it, if I have to break in!"

He put his hand on the knob and to his surprise it yielded, and he found himself in a roomy vestibule, where was a second door flanked on either side by closely cropped bay trees. This portal, however, refused to answer to his touch and after battling with it until he was breathless he espied set in the woodwork a small disc of brass. At the risk of summoning the fire department or the police the Captain gathered courage and touched it. To his dismay its center sank beneath the pressure of his finger, threatening to disappear altogether. Nevertheless resolutely he kept his hold. Whatever the havoc

his action wrought, at least as if by magic somebody appeared to be aware of it, for almost instantly the door opened and a white-haired man confronted him.

"I want to see my granddaughter," asserted Captain Jabez, squaring his shoulders and speaking with the imperiousness of one who brooks no denial. Still he kept his finger on the collapsible center of the brass disc.

"Yes, sir," came politely from the other man. "What name, sir?"

"Eh?" asked the visitor, scenting resistance and beginning to bristle.

"I simply wished to know the name of the person you desire to see," was the mild response.

"Penelope Turner."

"Miss Turner? Certainly, sir. I believe she is at home. Won't you step in?"

In the absence of anything savoring of antagonism the Old Captain weakened and he ventured to remove his hand from the gleaming metal circlet that had been his sesame to the mansion.

In he went through a high-studded hall, dim and spacious, where every footfall was muffled by heavy rugs. A sense of coolness, dignity and stillness came upon him. Color caught his eye and he was conscious of the perfume of flowers.

With a gesture of graciousness his conductor at length motioned him toward a carved settle.

"If you will be seated, sir, I will tell Miss Turner you are here," he said. "The name is —"

"I'm her grandfather, Jabez Allen."

If the words veiled a threat, at least the man who stood with such masklike serenity failed to betray that he found in them a menacing suggestion.

"Very well, sir," was all he said as he disappeared.

The welcome was anything but what Captain Jabez

had expected. Braced to encounter resistance and do battle his taut sinews relaxed and he sank feebly down on the wooden bench. Were Penelope to appear at this moment he doubted whether he would have found strength to pull himself together and get upon his feet.

And what would be her tidings? Ah! that question he hardly dared ask. He should know, without her telling him, the instant he saw her. Since childhood her face had been a mirror of candor. She might intrigue in small things but when it came to matters of principle she had never concealed wrong-doing, or attempted to do so. If she had sinned or been sinned against he should read it in her eyes.

With beating heart he waited. There was a quick step on the stairs, a swish of skirts, a flying figure sped toward him, and Penelope was in his arms.

"Grandfather!" she cried. "Grandfather, dear!"

In spite of his grim New England reserve the Old Captain's emotions swept beyond his control and he held her close; then imprisoning her hands and drawing them from his neck he held her from him, searching the sensitive countenance; but the eyes into which he looked did not fall before his scrutiny nor did the lips with their upward curve quiver. Nevertheless, despite this vindication he was conscious of a change. This was not the Penelope who four months before had left home. Vainly he tried to solve the puzzle and presently it seeped in on him that the subtle transformation he noticed lay in her style of hairdressing, in her clothes, in her general air. Penelope had become a lady. Her very speech and bearing were different. And yet, withal she was the same Penelope,—the same impulsive, emotional, affectionate creature whose indefinable charm had always fascinated and held him captive.

"There is nothing the matter at home, Grandfather?" she inquired tremulously, studying with rising distress his grave countenance.

"No, child, no. Not a thing. Is there anything the matter here, Penelope?"

"Here?" Unflinchingly she looked at him, genuine curiosity evident in her uplifted brows. Her childish lack of comprehension was not simulated; *she did not understand*. Had she been guilty the question would have seared as he had meant it should; but in her innocence the only reaction it called forth was bewilderment.

"Why did you think there was anything the matter?" she inquired, as she took the lapels of his coat in her hands and drew him nearer.

"I got sorter worried, I guess," replied he weakly.

"Imagining things? You poor dear!"

Her head was on his breast now and he could feel her soft hair brush his cheek.

"How did you find out where I was?" she asked at length, raising herself to steal a glance at him.

"Dick Morton was in Belleport an' told me."

"Dick! And how did he know?"

"I can't say."

"And it was because you heard I'd moved that you got anxious and came to Boston?"

"That was about it, yes."

"I'm so sorry you were alarmed," she said; then added, "I can't think how Dick could have found out where I was."

"Ain't addresses common property?"

"This one wasn't." The words were impulsively spoken and after they were uttered she seemed to regret them.

"Why not?"

"Because, you see, Mr. Hamilton and I decided I could

work with less interruption if nobody knew where I was," explained she slowly. "Besides —"

"Well," demanded her grandfather with quick suspicion.

"There were lots of reasons why it was better for me to keep my whereabouts a secret," she answered, betraying for the first time signs of uneasiness.

"But you might have let me know where you were. Why didn't you, Penelope?"

At the question her lids drooped until their fringed lashes curtained her eyes.

"I was afraid you might not understand — be worried," she faltered.

"Why?"

"Oh, because —"

"I want the truth, the whole of it," came from the Old Captain in a tense whisper.

With swift inquiry she gazed at him, scanning his face.

"I got a little tired and —"

"You were ill."

"How did you know, dear?" He felt her hand cover his as if she would shield him from a blow.

"By a curious chance I stumbled on the doctor who took care of you."

"Doctor Towner!" There was surprise in the comment, and relief too; but there was also misgiving.

"I suppose it was him — a big blue-eyed chap with glasses."

"Yes, yes; that was Doctor Towner. How splendid he is! And so you happened to meet him, did you? What did he tell you?"

"He said you had been very sick, Penelope?"

"I'm — I'm afraid I was," murmured she, instantly continuing, "and what else did he say?"

"He told me what the matter was," came in a low tone from Captain Jabez.

"Grandfather?" The cry mingled interrogation with distress.

"It was best I should know the facts, dear child. Why didn't you tell me yourself, Penelope?"

"Oh, I couldn't bear to!" she cried. "I knew you were doing all you could. How could I ask for more? It was tremendously generous of you to do so much. I thought I could get on until the book was done." Then as if a sudden fear had taken possession of her she whispered, "You don't think Mr. Hamilton knows, do you?"

"I've no notion what Hamilton knows," was the sharp retort. "Where did you first run afoul of this Hamilton, Penelope, an' how come he to bring you here? That is what I want to find out."

"Why, I can tell you all you wish to know, Grandfather," smiled she, drawing him down beside her on the settle. "It must seem strange to you. Still, it came about very naturally and I am sure when I explain it you will understand."

In simple, straightforward fashion she began her tale, sketching in the facts with rapid clear-cut strokes. Captain Jabez listened, his eyes never leaving her face. When the story was done he scratched his head as if there still remained elements in it that puzzled him.

"But all this don't tell why a man such as this Hamilton feller should have brought you here," he objected, his gaze riveted with piercing inquiry on his granddaughter.

"He wanted me to finish the book, Grandfather. Can't you see?" was the girl's eager reply. "He felt sure he was going to make money out of it and he wanted me where he could keep track of me."

"U — m. So that was what he told you, was it?"

"Yes."

The Captain stroked his rough chin.

"You see," went on Penelope with animation, "there was quite a lot more to be done to the manuscript. We had to go all over it and touch it up in places. I had never had any training in writing and Mr. Hamilton was very kind and patient about helping me. And then afterward we had to have a stenographer type it."

"O — h!"

"It has been a big piece of work, Grandfather."

He nodded.

"Is it done now?"

"Yes, every line of it!" Her eyes sparkled; but with his next words the glow in them died out.

"Then I take it there ain't no call for you to linger on here any longer."

"Why — eh —"

"There ain't nothin' to prevent your goin' back home with me, is there?"

"When?"

"Now — right off — to-day — this afternoon."

"Oh, Grandfather —" No confession could have been more eloquent than the impulsive objection, accompanied as it was by the color that flooded her face; it surged in mad riot up into her cheeks, dyeing them with a throbbing tide of scarlet.

"Well?"

"Why — I — yes — I suppose I could go home to-day," responded she slowly. "But wouldn't it be better for me to wait and — and — see Mr. Hamilton first? He has been very good to me, you know, and it hardly seems nice for me to — to go away without thanking him. Besides, I have to pack my things."

"You could write Mr. Hamilton all you need to say to him," was the curt answer. "As for packin', you

have plenty of time. The train doesn't go until nearly four o'clock. I figger you could bundle what few things you have into your trunk before then."

"I suppose I could."

"Then that's all right," smiled the Old Captain. "I guess 'twill seem pretty good to you to get out of this town an' back to the Cape. Hot weather is comin' an' the city is stiffen' already."

"I hadn't noticed it."

"That's 'cause up to now you've been busy. But once you're back in Belleport you'll twig the difference."

"I — suppose — so."

"Well, then, since everything's settled what do you say to you an' me goin' somewheres an' gettin' a square meal," suggested Captain Jabez gayly. "I'm famished! I feel like as if I'd never et nothin' in all my born days."

Ordinarily such a holiday scheme would have been hailed with delight by Penelope; but to-day she yielded to it with reluctance.

"I'll have to dress," objected she.

"Nonsense!"

"But I will have to, dear. I cannot go out to luncheon in this gown; besides, it will have to be packed."

"Well," capitulated the Captain impatiently. "Go ahead, then. I don't know nothin' about women's clothes. Only get ready fast as you can, 'cause I'm starvin' an' don't want to wait."

"I'll do the best I can."

Nevertheless, despite this acquiescence, as Penelope disappeared up the broad staircase there was a tilt to her resolute little head that hinted of revolt; it was as if she yielded but did not really surrender. The Old Captain smiled to himself but his tranquillity was not disturbed. Women were like that when taken by surprise. Neither Martha nor Elizabeth liked to have their plans abruptly

upset. A lack of adaptability was characteristic of the feminine sex.

No, it was neither Penelope nor her past that was giving him concern now. Evidently no harm had been done and if harm was intended he had thwarted its accomplishment before it had had opportunity to ripen into disaster. Henceforth he should drop Penelope from his thought.

But Mr. Gordon Hamilton was a bird of another feather. He should not let that gentleman off so easily or cease his investigations regarding his conduct until he had confronted the man face to face and wrung from him answers to a few of the questions that defied solution and baffled the mind. With Penelope's rôle in this curious drama he was satisfied; but Hamilton's enigmatic actions he had not yet probed to their depths. Had this stranger, as Penelope asserted, been governed solely by mercenary motives; or was there something finer and more altruistic behind his seeming heartlessness? Or was he a rascal urged on by depravity and evil intent?

Captain Jabez was at a loss to furnish replies to these questions. But he meant to know. He was determined to know. During the early afternoon while Penelope was busy with her packing he would hunt up Hamilton and force answers from him. If business interests had prompted him to act as he had he should be reimbursed for every cent he had expended; if philanthropy or the gentler impulses of pity had stirred him he should receive gratitude; but if his ultimate aim had been to ensnare the innocent he should be visited with the righteous wrath of the avenger.

With accumulating purpose the old man rose, then started back at the click of a key in the latch of the heavy door. Coming toward him through the dim hall ad-

vanced a figure that moved with a decision as definite as his own. It stopped before him with extended hand.

"I hoped to reach home, Mr. Allen, before you had the chance to slip away," said the stranger with a brilliant smile. "I am Gordon Hamilton."

CHAPTER XXIX

AN ALLIANCE

To all appearances Captain Jabez Allen failed to notice the extended hand, neither did he return the smile of the newcomer; but Hamilton passed lightly over these omissions as if unconscious of them.

"Doctor Towner called me up at the office," explained he, "and mentioned that you were here and of course I hailed the opportunity for meeting you and having a talk."

"I want to talk to you, too, sir," returned the Old Captain with emphasis.

"I thought perhaps you might," the other replied imperturbably. "Suppose we come into the library where we shall be less interrupted. Where is Miss Turner?"

"Penelope's gone upstairs to change her dress. I'm intendin' to take her out to get some lunch an' afterwards we're goin' to Belleport."

"Oh, I couldn't hear of your doing that," protested Gordon. "You must lunch here."

"Thankin' you kindly, sir, I think we'll go elsewhere."

"But why?"

"I ain't sure, Mr. Hamilton, that I want to break bread in this house."

The reply held a significance which it was useless to evade.

"I am afraid, Mr. Allen, you and I do not altogether

understand each other," answered his host with gentle dignity. "Let us sit down and see if we cannot clear up a few of the points that seem so troublesome."

"I'd admire to. Nothin' would suit me better."

They had entered the library and Hamilton with his accustomed graciousness drew forward a chair.

"I'd as lief stand, sir," came stubbornly from Captain Jabez.

"As you please."

Whatever else Hamilton might do, it was apparent that he did not intend to lose his temper; his attitude toward the man who confronted him was one of resolute patience and kindness. Moving quietly across the room, he closed the door.

"Now, Mr. Allen, I am at your service," he said. "What can I do for you?"

"What I want to know is how you came to bring my granddaughter here," answered the Cape Cod man, leaping without introduction to the heart of the issue in hand. "I want the truth, no matter what it is. I've got to have it."

Involuntarily and without the slightest consciousness of doing so Gordon Hamilton drew himself up and his lips parted as if a sharp retaliation trembled upon them; but an instant later he had checked the unspoken words and the tension of his figure relaxed.

"I will gladly tell you anything you wish to know, Mr. Allen," he responded. "I realize perfectly that the course I have pursued has not been usual and that it must seem strange to you. You certainly have the right to inquire into my motives. Nevertheless, I hope you will believe me when I tell you that everything I have done has been done with all respect and deference to Miss Turner. I was eager to help both her and myself and this method of doing it seemed to me the most direct way. If I have

erred by transgressing conventionalities it has not been from any unworthy motive."

"You ain't answered my question yet, Mr. Hamilton," was the Old Captain's retort. "I asked you why you brought Penelope here."

"Miss Turner was taken ill in my office."

"I'm aware of that." The eaglelike gaze that scrutinized Hamilton's face did not waver.

"She seemed to be very ill and to need care. I feared that if I sent her back to her boarding place she might be hurried to a hospital and perhaps — well, you know, Mr. Allen, what hospitals are. I just could not bear the idea of it."

"Did you suspect what was the matter with Penelope?" queried the fisherman with merciless directness.

For the first time Gordon hesitated.

"I — I — thought she had been — been working too hard and was fagged out."

"That was all you thought?"

The answer which Captain Jabez demanded did not come immediately.

"Not quite all," Hamilton admitted with reluctance.

"I thought she seemed —"

"Come, out with it! Don't let's stop to mince matters."

"It seemed to me that she had, perhaps, become so absorbed in her work that she had not taken the proper nourishment."

"So you knew it from the first, eh?"

"Knew what?" Adroitly Hamilton shifted the tables and became the inquisitor.

"That Penelope was 'most starved."

"I —" But Captain Jabez cut him short.

"You did know?" persisted the other.

"Yes," murmured Gordon unwillingly.

"An' knowin' that you fetched her here?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I had plenty of room and every facility for taking care of her as she should be taken care of, Mr. Allen. My housekeeper, who nursed my mother for years, is very clever with sick persons and I felt sure would know what to do. No—" he held up a hand to stay his visitor who would have interrupted him, "do not misunderstand me. I was selfish in what I did. I felt confident that the book Miss Turner had written would make a big hit and be a money getter for our firm. I had no intention of letting her slip into invalidism and leave the manuscript unfinished. I wanted her where I could keep track of her until it was done."

"So that was it! An' that was all?"

"Yes, that was all at the time — or at least I thought it was," muttered Gordon, thrusting his hands moodily into his coat pockets and studying the Bokhara on which his feet were planted.

"Have you anything more you want to add to what you've already told me, Mr. Hamilton?" Captain Jabez presently inquired, when the pause had lapsed into oppressive silence.

"Only this — that although I have tried to shield Miss Turner in every way from comment and criticism, I am afraid the means I have taken to do so may have been a blundering one and brought about the exact result I desired to avoid. I can see now that it would have been wiser, fairer to you, had she written and acquainted you with the circumstances under which she was here; or it might have been better if I had not brought her here at all. It is hard to know. But when I talked with her I found her so eager to keep the fact of her illness from you that I counseled her to say nothing about it. She

thought it would hurt you, and that if we could prevent your knowing it might save you regret. Moreover, it was not a thing to be gossiped about. You see, Mr. Allen, your granddaughter is to become quite a person when her book is out. Instantly the public will be clamoring to hear all about her and her affairs. I did not wish people to know — ”

“ I understand,” put in Captain Jabez with quick perception. “ So that was it ! ”

“ That is not quite all.”

Nevertheless, despite the intimation that he had more to say Gordon Hamilton did not speak at once, and when at length he did it was to add in a voice tremulous with earnestness :

“ I have concealed two facts from Miss Turner and I should appreciate it if for the present at least you would help me to conceal them, Mr. Allen. One is that when I brought her here I knew — ”

“ That she was penniless an’ starvin’ — ”

Hamilton nodded.

“ An’ the other ? ”

“ The other is that I love her.”

The room was very still and the men confronting one another as motionless as statues.

“ I think that I must have loved her from the first, although I was not aware of it until recently. But I have been unwilling to let her know this. In the first place, she is beneath my roof and were I to tell her it might put her in an awkward position; in the second place, she persists in feeling that she is indebted to me and I do not wish her misled by any impulses of gratitude to take this means of making restitution. Much as I love her — nay, because I love her — I could not accept such a sacrifice. She must come to me solely because she cares for me or not at all.”

How vibrant with throbbing stillness the great room was!

Then, breaking in upon its intensity, came the voice of Captain Jabez:

"Mr. Hamilton," he said, striding toward the younger man with extended palm, "when I met you in the hallway I refused to take your hand. I ask your pardon, sir. I wronged an honest gentleman an' I am ashamed of it."

"I pray, Mr. Allen, that you —"

"I ain't been fair to you, sir," went on the Old Captain, not permitting his confession to be checked. "I came here suspectin' an' cursin' you. I shall go away to bless you for your goodness to my child. But for you she might not be alive now. Oh, I understand how it all come about — her pride, an' her unwillingness to ask for more money; an' yet I'd have worked my fingers to the bone an' gladly sent her every penny I had rather than that she should have come to want in a big city such as this." He shuddered. "How am I ever goin' to repay you, Mr. Hamilton?"

"By keeping my two secrets, Mr. Allen. That is all the payment I wish. When we can serve those we love the joy of doing it is payment in itself."

"You say you ain't said nothin' to Penelope?" ventured the fisherman, suddenly becoming shy.

"No."

"Do you think she suspects how you feel?"

"I do not know. It hardly seems possible she shouldn't. And yet I have tried to —"

"You have been a gentleman in every sense of the word, Mr. Hamilton. Few men would have acted as you have. I appreciate it, sir."

"You would be willing, then, that after Penelope has returned to Belleport I should come to see her?"

"Certain."

"I should like it," went on Hamilton swiftly, "if — if — she cared for me, if we could be married soon. There would be no reason for delay. My house awaits a mistress and I have sufficient income to support a wife."

Captain Jabez took a turn across the room, rumpling his thin locks as he went. He seemed to be trying to accustom himself to a new idea.

"I s'pose likely there wouldn't be nothin' much to wait for," he agreed. "Penelope ain't never been really happy at home. By that, I mean she ain't never really fitted in with her aunts. They're good souls but they ain't understood her an' it's been a bit hard. Fur's I can see there'd be no objections. Of course, I'd miss her — " the old man faltered an instant, "but then, as you yourself were sayin' a minute ago, servin' those we love is payment in itself. The rest you know. There's no use pretendin' we're anything we ain't. Penelope comes of plain folks, Mr. Hamilton. I hope you've thought of that carefully. She ain't been brought up as you've been an' she won't bring you nothin'."

"If she will bring me herself it will be all I ask. Besides, Penelope is to be a celebrity some day. There is no inequality in the marriage," declared Gordon proudly, "or if there is it is on my side."

"Then I take it you an' me understand one another at last, young man," concluded Captain Jabez, with one of his rare smiles.

"I think we do, yes. And you will remain for luncheon?"

"Since you're so kind, sir, I'd admire to. An' more'n that I'll set down," added he whimsically.

As he dropped into one of the leather chairs Hamilton stepped forward and touched a bell.

"There will be three at luncheon, Roberts," he announced to his servant. "And go up and ask Miss Turner if she will join us in the library. Tell her that her grandfather has decided to lunch here."

CHAPTER XXX

CAPTAIN JABEZ MAKES A MISTAKE

THE hours following Penelope's return to Belleport surged with intermingled impressions that took on for the girl an unreality mystic and memorable. Every homely detail of the old life from which she had been so long estranged was gilded with the charm of novelty. Never had the weather-beaten house at the sea's rim appeared so picturesque and precious, never the vast out-of-doors with its immensity of space and stillness so limitless and beautiful.

When, the supper dishes washed, she slipped from the kitchen and stood alone in the twilight beneath the arching infinitude of sky a vital realization of her oneness with the Divine overwhelmed her. So close did that brooding presence seem that she felt she had only to traverse the shimmering zone of light which, clear-cut as a ribbon of gold, narrowed away to meet the sagging moon, to be at the footstool of the God whose love banded the swinging planets and vibrated unmistakably in the atmosphere about her.

In Penelope's breast rioted a chaos of emotions that went to make up this exultation. Paramount among them was a happiness which mounted to the dizzy heights of ecstasy and was born of a cause she was at a loss to define. She had, to be sure, wrested success from a none too generous world; but the joy that thrilled her arose not from this personal triumph. It was rooted in something deeper and more satisfying, something that was not

of herself alone although intertwined with the very fibers of her being and pulsing with the throbbing of her own heart. And with this strange and never before experienced joy in paradoxical contrast ran an undercurrent of haunting sadness, vague as a mist and as intangible. Its note quivered poignantly in everything about her—in the sobbing of the sea, in the whisper of the surf, in the music of the dark, land-born pines whose eerie shadows blackened the hills that hemmed in the village.

'Twixt these two sensations she stood poised like a soul between two worlds, borrowing from the one an ineffable bliss and from the other a pain that transcended any suffering she had previously known. Subconsciously there recurred to her mind with a persistence not to be vanquished the remembrance of Gordon Hamilton to whom she had so recently said farewell. They had parted with a handclasp close and firm, and a long wordless look when his eyes had held hers for an interval overpowering in its intensity. But there had been no speech between them and after this silent adieu she had gone out from his home never to return.

It was strange how vital a part of her life the brief stay beneath this man's roof had become. When the door closed upon the incident the sound caused her to cringe as if she were shut out of paradise. Of late she had felt herself to be very closely knit to the old mansion; for with the return of her strength, gratitude had prompted her to assume trifling duties in connection with it that immediately transformed her from an onlooker to a participator in its domestic régime. She had, for example, assumed the care of the plants and flowers, and it had pleased her to see Hamilton's face brighten when he espied about the house touches that were unmistakably hers. For Penelope's passion for beauty could not but voice *itself*; and when it spoke it was not in the terms of the

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traditional and hackneyed. From the treasures the house possessed she sought out rare and unusual containers for her blossoms, and formed combinations of grace and color that instantly betrayed another hand than Catherine's.

Sometimes, too, on a day when Roberts and the maids were busier than usual, she had ventured to dust her room and as she touched its time-worn furnishings she had delighted to recall how Gordon's mother and his grandmother must long ago have fingered these very objects. How the contact seemed to merge her into their lives and his, and how natural the connection!

Well, that chapter of her existence was closed. She had come back to Belleport to live out her years, come with those priceless remembrances to enrich them and render them forever sacred; and even though the Cinderella tale was told was it not something to have played a part in it if only for a fleeting moment? Nothing could ever wrest those days of magic from her. They were hers to rehearse and delight in so long as memory should remain.

Conjuring them up now in imagination she tried to tint with the afterglow of their splendor the gray realities of the present. For in the same proportion that her old life heralded its beauties with heightened emphasis, so in like ratio were its irritating elements accentuated. Aunt Martha's unyielding New Englandism had never stood out with such austerity and unloveliness. Aunt Elizabeth's petty gossip and triviality had never been more patience taxing. Oh, they had rejoiced to have her back again,—there could be no question about that; but they were far less interested in hearing of her achievements than they were in the knowledge that once again she would be at hand to bear her share in the household duties.

This limitation of their vision grated keenly on Penelope's sensitively attuned nature. How narrow they were, how selfish! And yet had she but been acquainted with the entire truth she might have been less severe in her judgment, for in point of fact Captain Jabez, knowing well his daughters and not trusting Elizabeth's artless and indiscreet tongue, had to a great extent held back the story of Penelope's experiences in Boston. They would not be able, argued he to himself, to regard the information impartially and from a broad angle. Martha's first comment would be:

"Well, this only proves that I was right when I said the city warn't any place to send a girl like Penelope."

Elizabeth, less balanced than her sister, would be likely to fly off at almost any unexpected and illogical tangent and spread throughout the community indiscreet gossip. It was from this comment the Old Captain was determined to shield not only Penelope but Hamilton and the Allen family as well. The Allens had been talked about enough. The whispering tongues of the hamlet should have no opportunity to bandy about and distort stories of the girl's illness, her residence at Hamilton's house, or the possible happy climax to her romance. It was too delicate a fabric to be fingered by blundering hands. Hence he kept the affair locked within his breast and as he counseled his granddaughter to do the same, Belleport was none the wiser concerning her adventures.

Nevertheless the transformation that had been worked in Penelope could not be concealed and was apparent to every one with whom she came in contact.

"She's older, quieter, more in earnest," announced Elizabeth. "An' yet that ain't really it, either."

"She's somehow more real," Martha observed, wrinkling her brows thoughtfully.

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Both opinions were true but perhaps the latter was the more intelligent. Penelope was more real. Far behind her she had flung all artificiality and without self-consciousness had lapsed into the spontaneously delightful and complex individual heaven had foreordained her to be. She charmed by her very personality; she piqued, interested, allured.

"I don't see what's come over the child," marveled Aunt Elizabeth. "Those four months in the city seem to have made her all over. She's like as if she'd been to Europe or somewheres. Queer, ain't it? Of course her clothes are accountable for a lot. That hat she wears seems to put the very devil into her. The tilt of it actually does somethin' to her, though I don't know what it is. I wonder if I could fix over my black straw to look like that."

"Mercy sakes, Eliza, it makes me sick to hear a woman of your age talkin' all the time about the fashions," interrupted her sister with grim rebuke. "You'd much better put your mind on the savin' of your immortal soul!"

"Why can't I think of my hat an' my soul too?" retorted Elizabeth pertly.

"'Cause it never works out that way."

"What never works out that way?" inquired Penelope, who had just entered with a sheaf of purple iris in her arms.

"Mindin' your soul an' your hat at the same time," her aunt declared. "We expect frivolity an' foolishness of the young. If you choose to put all the money you earn on your back, for instance, that's for you to say; but it ain't becomin' to 'Liza to do it."

"Penelope didn't put all her money on her back, Martha," Elizabeth protested indignantly. "Didn't she mail that check home to Pa?"

"Much good it did him!" sniffed Martha.

"Why do you say that?" the girl inquired, glancing quickly from one woman to the other.

"He didn't tell you then?" piped Elizabeth with a significant smile.

"Tell me what?"

"Why, your grandfather —" her aunt began, delighted to be the spokesman of tidings so startling. But Martha cut her short.

"I s'pose you couldn't rest, 'Liza, if you didn't blab all you know," declared she with scorn.

"You began it; I didn't. 'Twas you mentioned the check first."

"No matter who mentioned it," burst out Penelope.

"What I want to know is what happened?"

"Why, the check got tore up."

"Torn up!"

"Yes," nodded Martha. "Your grandfather was so flustered with startin' off to Boston that he tore the check up by mistake. I never knew him to do such a thing before. Of course, after he'd been so heedless he felt pretty small about it, an' was ashamed to tell a soul. Hadn't Eliza discovered the pieces lyin' on the lawn, we'd never 'a' been the wiser."

Searchingly Penelope looked from one of her aunts to the other. Elizabeth stared at her in return; but Martha's eyes dropped to a pan she was buttering.

"It doesn't sound like Grandfather," she said slowly.

"No more it does," Martha echoed. "Still, goin' to Boston an' all ain't an everyday happenin' with Pa. Like enough he was kinder swept out of his senses by the prospect."

"So he never used the check," mused Penelope, bewildered.

"He didn't have no chance," put in Elizabeth. "He

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didn't get it 'til last night. Even if he hadn't tore it up he wouldn't have had time to cash it."

"No — o, of course not." The girl was thoughtful.

"Fur's that goes, there's no call for anybody to go fussin' about that check," Martha asserted, going quietly to the corner cupboard and raising the lid of the blue Canton sugar-bowl. "Here it is!"

"What?" cried Elizabeth and her niece in a breath.

Martha extended the slip of green paper.

"I pasted it together," explained she simply. "I'd a notion Pa might be sorry about it an' wish he had it back. 'Twarn't much' work to doctor it up, an' in case he wanted it 'twould be at hand. See! You can hardly tell the difference."

Reaching out, Penelope took the magic fragment between her fingers and let her eyes wander to its boldly inscribed signature: *Gordon Hamilton*. Even the sight of the name threw her into a tumult of emotion.

"Grandfather must cash this right away," announced she hurriedly. "I'm going to take it to him now."

"I reckon it's yours to do with as you please," conceded Martha, with a shrug of her shoulders.

Clutching the fragile bit of paper in her hand, Penelope hastened out. The moon was now riding high in the heaven and amid a flood of silver light the patches of Queen Anne's lace that spangled the lawn looked like snow. How sweet was the pine-perfumed air! How still the night!

Beyond in the sprawling shadow of the barn she could see her grandfather shutting up the hens. She hurried to join him.

"That you, Penelope?" he called.

"Yes, Grandfather. Aren't you coming in pretty soon? It is getting late."

"Yes, child, yes; I'm comin' right away. I've been

dickerin' with the hens. They seemed sorter spleeny. I can't think what could 'a' come over 'em — though fur's that goes I ain't fur from feelin' spleeny myself. A day in the city leaves me clean beat out. I ain't young like you, Penelope. Likely you'd be pleased enough to live in Boston all the time."

The girl looked away quickly.

"U—m! That's about what I imagined," was the Old Captain's gruff comment. "An' who knows but you may be doin' it sometime, too? Stranger things have happened."

"I guess that is a strangeness that is not likely to happen," fluted Penelope lightly.

"You never can tell," drawled her grandfather. "Life is an almighty queer place. I was up to Morton's this evenin'," continued he nonchalantly. "Dick's here seein' his folks. He's goin' back to Boston to-morrow mornin'. Him an' me had quite a chat. He's a well-meanin' chap, Dick is, although he blunders at times an' goes off half-cocked. He tells me he's goin' to get married."

"Married?" gasped Penelope.

"Yep," nodded Captain Jabez, darting a shrewd glance at the girl's moonlit countenance. "He's marryin' the daughter of the man he works for—a Miss Wilmot. 'Most nobody knows it yet but he told me. Seems she was engaged to somebody else, an Englishman I think it was, but that's all broken off. Yes, Dick's marryin' her. He's pleased clean out of his wits, poor lad. I figger it was sorter sudden an' unexpected all around. His folks did not have an inklin' of it."

"I hope they're glad," put in Penelope quickly. "I met Miss Wilmot once in Boston and she seemed awfully *nice*."

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The Old Captain thrust his hand into his pocket for his pipe and proceeded to light it.

"Then you don't mind Dick's marryin'?" he at last puffed bluntly.

"Mind? Why should I?"

"I didn't think you would," declared the old man tranquilly. "Still, there's never any calculatin' on what a woman may do."

"Or a man either, Grandfather," laughed Penelope merrily. "How did you happen to tear my check?"

"Eh!" ejaculated Captain Jabez, plainly nonplused by the question.

"Aunt Martha said you were so addled getting off to Boston this morning that by mistake you tore up the check I sent you."

"She told you that, did she?"

"Yes."

"Well, well!" He appeared to be temporizing. "Martha certainly reads me like a book," he at length observed, with a broad smile. "She's keener'n a hawk, that woman!"

Penelope watched while he rubbed his hands awkwardly together.

"Fortunately the check wasn't badly torn, Grandfather," announced she. "It has been nicely mended. See!"

"Bless my soul!" The Captain was plainly amazed and showed it.

"You don't suppose the bank will mind taking it, do you? You can explain to them how it happened."

"Oh, Eli won't mind," returned Captain Jabez, flattening the green paper on his palm and turning it so that the silvery radiance of the moon fell full on it. "All I'll need to say will be that I tore it up by mistake — *by mistake*," reiterated he with emphasis.

CHAPTER XXXI

A DAY DREAM

THE next morning Captain Jabez awoke in the highest of spirits. Almost before sunrise, through the partition that separated their rooms, Penelope could hear him splashing the water about and dressing to a brisk accompaniment of "Pop Goes the Weasel." Breakfast over, off he scurried to Sawyer's Falls, delaying only long enough to search his pockets for Martha's much crumpled grocery list; although sadly in need of a pair of knitting needles, such was his haste and impatience that Elizabeth dared not suggest an additional errand.

"He's as possessed to be off as a boat with her sails set," grumbled she. "To see him you'd think the Old Nick himself was after him."

Her sister laughed.

"Likely he ain't for takin' any more chances with that check," she replied. "Besides, he knows you're standin' ready to hitch a lot more things on to that list of his an' he ain't riskin' that. Just because he has some money it's no sign he's hankerin' to spend it."

"Knittin' needles ain't much to buy."

"They are for Pa," Martha answered. "Sometimes I wish spendin' a cent hurt you as it hurts him; I reckon you wouldn't let the pennies slip through your fingers fast as you do if it did."

"He's spent enough on Penelope."

"That's different. Penelope is somethin' to Pa that

nobody else in the world is. Besides, he's shrewd. I reckon he figgered that what he put out on Penelope was a sort of investment. An' he warn't far wrong either. He got his money back again, you see."

"Still, he might not have."

"That's true. But did you ever see the day Pa warn't able to pick a winner? He knew better'n you or me what he was doin'. He has a long head on his shoulders, Pa has, if he does let Penelope bamboozle him."

In silence Elizabeth rinsed the dish towels.

"Ain't it queer how that girl has turned out — writin' that book an' all?" ruminated she. "It 'most takes my breath away every time I think of it. It keeps comin' to me in the night how pleased Mary'd be — an' that poor, scatter-brain husband of hers, too. Do you know, Martha, I've sometimes thought there was more to John Turner than any of us gave him credit for."

"Mebbe there was," was her sister's noncommittal response. "Certainly Mary must 'a' seen somethin' in him that other folks didn't see."

"That's kinder like it is with Penelope, ain't it?" Elizabeth meandered on. "You wouldn't ever have put her down for bein' particularly smart. Pa seems terrible impressed by what she'd done. He told me last night that there was no knowin' where she might fetch up."

"Pa's awful mysterious an' strange since he got back from Boston," remarked Martha half to herself. "He acts as if he'd got somethin' on his mind. I can't think what the matter can be with him."

"I ain't noticed nothin'." Elizabeth was instantly on edge with curiosity.

"Oh, likely it's only my imagination," Martha hurriedly declared, as if regretting the observation.

"But it must be somethin' if you've noticed it," Eliza insisted. "I will confess I've caught him lookin' at

Penelope sorter queer, as if he was puzzlin' about her. Still, that ain't to be wondered at, considerin'."

"No, of course not," rejoined Martha. "Prob'ly Pa is just tryin' same as the rest of us to get used to the idea of her earnin' all that money."

Evidently the explanation satisfied Elizabeth for with the dish towels in her hands she moved toward the door.

"Mebbe," agreed she indifferently. "These towels are gettin' yellower'n saffron. I'm goin' to lay 'em out on the grass. By the way, where's Penelope?"

"She's over at the beach."

"At the beach! At this time of day? For goodness' sake! Anybody'd think there warn't a thing in the world to do. What's took her there?"

"Pa suggested it."

"Pa!"

Martha nodded.

"Yes, Pa said now she was home she must take a bit of a rest. He said she'd been workin' pretty hard in Boston."

"But writin' ain't work," Elizabeth objected. "Why, whenever I want to rest my feet I always drop down an' write a letter."

"It does seem light work; of course, it ain't to be mentioned in the same breath with washin' or cleanin'. I s'pose, though, that doin' a lot of it is tiresome in its way."

"Penelope doesn't look tired."

"I know she doesn't. In fact, I never saw her so healthy in all my life. Still, tired or not, them was Pa's orders. He said we weren't to let her do a thing round the house for a week at least."

"A week! Is she goin' to take a whole week of loiterin'? I never heard of such a notion! If Pa don't look out he'll have Penelope back mopin' like she was before."

She's given enough to moonin' round without bein' encouraged in it. She don't need to be egged on to do it, goodness knows. I should think Pa was crazy. Why, to set round a whole week is enough to drive anybody clean out of their mind."

"I certainly wouldn't care to idle that way myself," acquiesced Martha. "I have to be doin' somethin'; when I ain't I'm like a fish out of water. But Penelope's different. She can sit an' look straight ahead of her for hours together."

"That's the Turner in her!" announced Elizabeth. "Why, I've seen John Turner sit like a heathen image an' stare at the ocean when there warn't so much as a sail to be spied on it. I remember askin' him once what he thought he was lookin' at an' he told me it warn't nothin' I could see. His answer nettled me. I know I'm near-sighted; still, I can usually make out everything other folks can, when I've my glasses on. I told him that but he only smiled an' kept insistin' glasses wouldn't help me none. He seemed to be sorter enjoyin' some joke all to himself an' it made me so mad that by an' by I got out of patience an' snapped out sorter sharp that if what he was lookin' at was that small I didn't consider it worth lookin' at anyhow. With that I come into the house an' left him settin' there, still starin'."

"'Twas just like him," sniffed Martha. "He certainly was the oddest critter alive. No wonder he led poor Mary a helterskelter life. Penelope is lots like him. I can see his traits croppin' out in her every day. The way she wanders off to the shore an' sets mullin' over her thoughts is John Turner to the core. I could no more do it than I could fly! Why, I can think every thought I ever had in half an hour," concluded Martha with spirit. "After that I'd only be chewin' the same old cuds over again."

In the meantime Penelope, the unconscious subject of this speculation, sat with her knees locked within the clasp of her pretty arms where her favorite silvered fish house etched its clear shadow on the pallid sands of the beach. The sun flooding the sky had transformed into a radiant fabric the light morning mist and through its gauzy veil the surface of the sea, tenanted by a single schooner, was visible. A mysterious thing it seemed, drifting lazily along amid the billowing clouds of its canvas, a poem whose grace was a beauty to dream about. How gently it rose and dipped with the breathing tide. Toward what haven was its rudder bent, and what was the freight that weighted its deep-nestling hull into the trough of the waves?

For a long time Penelope sat letting her fancy travel its wake as, like a giant bird, it skimmed the ocean's jade breast. Then her reverie was put to rout by the approach of a man who came swinging along the strand. There was no mistaking that figure, and as she recognized it her heart gave a great tumultuous leap of happiness. She dared neither move nor speak lest the vision vanish and prove itself to be only a mirage as ephemeral as the eerie haze hovering over the water.

That it was no phantom, however, was immediately proved for in another moment Gordon Hamilton had flashed her a smile and taken his place beside her in the cool shade of the fish house.

"Penelope!" he whispered, seizing her hands. "Penelope! You're not surprised to see me, dearest. You knew I would come." He drew her unresisting form into the shelter of his arm. "I was up with the dawn that another day might not pass before I had told you how much I love and need you. Come back home to me, Penelope. The old house is gloomy as a prison since you left it. All the sunshine has gone out of it. I never

dreamed I could miss you so! I want you for my wife, Penelope. Come back to me! Will you come?"

For a moment the girl did not answer. The rush of joy that overwhelmed her made her tremble.

"Don't you love me, Penelope?" pleaded Hamilton, instantly alarmed.

At the words she slowly turned her head toward him, letting him look into her great wondering eyes; then with a burning blush she buried her face on his breast.

"I shall not be selfish with you, sweetheart," hurried on the man, his sentences coming swiftly. "I do not mean to wall you up in my home, make a slave of you, and cut you off from the career that lies ahead of you. You shall live your own life —"

"My life?" she interrupted.

"Your real life, I mean."

With a gesture exquisite with tenderness she raised her head and placed both her hands in his:

"My real life is with you," said she softly. "I do not want any other."

FINIS



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